Who is a Hindu?

Hindu Revivalist Views of Animism, Buddhism, Sikhism and Other Offshoots of Hinduism

KOENRAAD ELST

As part of their entrenched power position, the British colonizers and later their Nehruvian successors have always tried to control the discourse on religion. Among other concerns, they have seen to it that the term "Hindu" got divorced from its historical meaning, which quite inclusively encompassed all Indian Pagans, in order to fragment Hindu society. In parallel with their effort to pit caste against caste, they have tried to pit sect against sect, offering nurture to the egos of sect leaders by telling them that in fact they were popes in their own right of full-fledged religions, equal in status but morally superior to Hinduism. Hindu Revivalists have countered this effort by reaffirming the basic Hindu character of tribal Animism, Jainism, Buddhism, Sikhism and more recent reformist sects.

A more practical way of dealing with the question whether given sects are Hindu or not, is to study the specific claims made by the "separatist" ideologues of the communities concerned. When we do so, we find that Hindu Revivalist critique has pin-pricked (though not yet exhaustively) some of the cheap modern apologetics by which community leaders want to affirm the uniqueness and superiority of their own tradition as compared to Hinduism. This is especially true of the number one selling argument of all non-Hindu or would-be non-Hindu religions in India: that they, unlike Hinduism, are egalitarian.

If a man is poor and without social position, or if he is the target of accusations and the object of contempt, he finds himself quite alone. Even his relatives avoid and disown him. And if later on his name is cleared and his good fortune returns, the fairweather friends will again come flocking to his company.

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KOENRAAD ELST

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FOR MY DEAR CHRISTEL,
ON THE OCCASION OF HER TAKING REFUGE IN BUDDHISM.

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Foreword

This book contains a part of my Ph.D. thesis, updated and adapted for general publication. It can best be read in conjunction with the main part of the thesis, now in print under the title *Decolonizing the Hindu Mind*.

My thanks are due to Mrs. Yamini Liu, Mr. Gopi Maliwal, Mr. Krishan Bhatnagar, Mr. Pradeep Goel, Mr. Satinder Trehan, Dr. Tushar Ravuri and Mr. Vishal Agarwal, as well as to the late Prof. Kedar Nath Mishra. But any mistakes are of course due only to my own oversight. Corrections and other feedback are welcomed.

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1. Credal definitions

"The question is", said Alice, "whether you *can* make words mean so many different things."

"The question is", said Humpty Dumpty, "which is to be master—that's all."[1]

A lot of ink has flowed over the question how to *define* Hinduism. There is no other religion for which the question of definition is so difficult. A Roman Catholic could be defined as a person who is baptized by a priest ordained within an apostolic succession going back to Jesus, and who accepts the Nicean Creed and the authority of the Bishop of Rome. A Muslim is defined by the Muslims themselves as one who has affirmed the Islamic creed: that there is no god beside Allah and that Mohammed is Allah's prophet. A Buddhist is one who has taken the triple refuge into the Buddha, his teachings and his community. But there seems to be no accepted definition of a Hindu, neither one sanctioned by Hindu tradition nor one on which the scholarly community agrees.

Yet, for a "Hindu" movement the choice of a good definition may be a very consequential matter. In this book, we will see how the Hindu Revivalist movement since ca. 1875 has dealt with the question: Who is a Hindu?

1.1. Vedic Hinduism

According to Ananda Coomaraswamy, "the literature of Indian thought, apart from Buddhism as interpreted by

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[1] From *Through the Looking-Glass*, in *The Complete Illustrated Works of Lewis Carroll*, p.184.

Buddhists, exhibits a continuous development, and knows no acute crises; or rather, the real crises—such as the identification of all gods as one, and the development of the doctrines of emancipation and transmigration—are not determined by names and dates, they were not announced as the Dharma of any one teacher, and they are only recognized in retrospection. Here there is a gradual process of 'thinking aloud', wherein by stripping the self of veil after veil of contingency there is nothing left but the Abyss which is 'not so, not so', the 'Ground' of unity. From animism to idealism there is direct development, and it is for this reason that we meet with primitive terminologies invested with a new significance; moreover the old strata persist beneath the newest layers, and thus it is not only primitive terms, but also primitive thoughts which persist in the great complex that we speak of as Brahmanism. But this does not mean that the highest of these thoughts is primitive, it means only that the historical continuity of thought is preserved in the final system, and that system remains adapted to the intelligence of various minds."[2]

This way, Hinduism cannot be caught in a criterion defining a specific stage of human religious development. Rather, like an individual human being (or like a nation), it represents a continuous identity through very different stages, and carrying the memory and the remains of all these stages along. For this reason, it is very difficult to formulate an essentialist definition of Hinduism, of the type: "Is Hindu, he who satisfies the following criteria:..." Even more difficult is, to catch Hinduism in doctrinal criteria: "Is Hindu, he who believes the following truth claims:..."

A well-known but evidently inaccurate proposal of definition was made by Bal Gangadhar Tilak, the "Father of the Indian Freedom Struggle", who chose "belief in the Vedas, variety in the means and infiniteness of the objects of worship" as the criteria for being a Hindu.[3] The "variety in the means" is a valuable contribution, because it explicitates what is often only a tacit assumption presupposed in most Hindu teachings. The acceptance of many approaches to the ultimate truth is indeed a distinctive characteristic of Hinduism, distinguishing it from the exclusivism intrinsic to Christianity and Islam.

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[2] Ananda Coomaraswamy: *Buddha and the Gospel of Buddhism*, p.207.

Yet, this reading may be too optimistic: perhaps "disagreement about the means" would be a better description than "variety in the means". Thus, many of the Sants of the Bhakti movement (Kabir, Nanak, Chaitanya) extol repeating the God-name as the means to Liberation and explicitly denounce both rituals and ascetic practices as *false* ways. Hindus have only agreed to disagree and not to interfere with other people's practices eventhough these may be considered as deceptive paths leading nowhere. It is perhaps in this sense that Hindus could accept the presence of Christians and Muslims as much as that of rival Hindu sects, because all of them, i.e. both non-Hindus and Hindus of certain rival schools, are considered as being equally in the wrong. At any rate, Hindu tradition has an acute sense of true and false (hence a lively culture of debate), and it does not attribute equal truth to Hindu and non-Hindu, nor even to different Hindu schools of thought.

The assumption that all roads lead to the same goal is typical for modern (urban and Western-oriented) Hinduism as propagated by Swami Vivekananda and numerous more recent Gurus. Thus, in his highly critical account of the specificities of "Renaissance, English-speaking, eclectic, basically anti-Sanskritic, pamphletistic neo-Vedanta", including its tendency to uncritical "synthesis", the late Agehananda Bharati remarks: "Patanjali's yoga is for people who have accepted brahmin theology. This is a fact which is systematically overlooked (...) by many teachers of the Hindu Renaissance. One of their perennial mottoes was that all religions are the same, that everyone can be a yogi on the basis of his own theology, or of no theology."[4]

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[3] First given during Tilak's speech at the 1892 Ganapati festival in Pune; quoted in D. Keer: *Lokamanya Tilak*, p.173-174.

Hinduism, by contrast, has kept up a tradition of debate and scholastic argument since hoary antiquity, and has typically scorned soft options and insisted on radicalism, not in the sense of smashing the heads of people who disagree, but in the sense of settling for nothing less than the truth which liberates. Recent Hindu Revivalists merely return to the genuine Hindu tradition when they state that "the comparatively new-fangled notion that all religions are one, equal or equally valid (...) to us is a pleasant falsehood and thereby the biggest stumbling block in the understanding of religion and the religions".[5] They refer to the Mahabharata editor Vyasa who exercised his power of discrimination when he observed that "moral principles may be shared by all religions (...), but their philosophical positions are often different".[6] And who is to say that philosophical viewpoints don't matter?

Even at the level of moral precepts, religions are far from equal. Leave alone the details such as dietary taboos, even the general principles may differ considerably. Thus, ecstatic states provoked by alcohol and other psychotropic substances are sought after in many animistic and Shamanistic traditions, but abhorred in more sober traditions like Buddhism and Islam. Violence is strongly condemned in Jainism but glorified, at least in specific conditions, in Islam and other religions. Again, these differences exist not only between Hindu and non-Hindu, but also within the Hindu commonwealth of schools and sects. Tilak is aware of this pluriformity; what he intended to add, is that this "variety of means" is not merely a factual situation, but that it is also valued positively by Hinduism, and that in this, Hinduism differs from its major rivals, which impose a single worldview and a single system of ethics on their adherents.

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[4] Agehananda Bharati: *Light at the Center*, p.155.

[5] Harsh Narain: *Myth of Composite Culture*, p.47.

[6] Harsh Narain's paraphrase (*Myth of Composite Culture*, p.53) of Mahabharata, Shanti-Parva 300:9.

But the major problem with Tilak's definition is the criterion of "belief in the Veda". This reduction of Hinduism to the "believers" in the Veda does injustice to any accepted usage of the term *Hindu* (apart from contradicting Tilak's own just-quoted position of a plurality of ways, arguably including non-Vedic ways as well). For centuries, Brahmins prohibited lower-caste Hindus from hearing, reciting and studying the Vedas, a prohibition still supported in principle by Tilak himself.[7] Are those Hindus who are unfamiliar with the Vedas being excluded from the range of the definition? This would be greatly welcomed by anti-Hindu polemicists, who like to claim that only upper-caste Hindus are real Hindus.

Moreover, the expression "belief in the Vedas" shows a rather crude understanding of the exact place of the Veda in the doctrine of its adepts, a place which is radically different from that of the Quran for Muslims. In the Quran it is God who speaks to man, while in the Veda it is man who sings praise to the Gods. It is not even clear what "believing" would mean in the case of the Vedas, collections of hymns written for a number of Gods by several dozens of male and female poets over several centuries. If someone compiles an *Anthology of English Religious Verse*, would it make sense to say: "I *believe* in this anthology"?

The matter becomes a bit clearer when we consider Tilak's Sanskrit original:

prâmâṇyabuddhirvedeshu sâdhanânâmanekatâ
upâsyânâmaniyama etaddharmasya lakshaṇam.[8]

Savarkar translates it as: "Belief in the Vedas, many means, no strict rule for worship: these are the features of the Hindu religion."[9] More literally, it would read: "Acknowledging the authority of the Vedas, pluralism ('not-one-ness') of spiritual paths, no fixity about the objects of worship: that is the characteristic of the Dharma."

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[7] D. Keer: *Lokamanya Tilak*, p.174-175.

[8] Reproduced in V.D. Savarkar: *Hindutva*, p.109.

The point is that the Vedas are to be considered as a *pramâṇa*, a "means of valid knowledge", on a par with direct perception and inference. *Veda* may be understood in a very broad sense (common enough in actual usage, e.g. "Vedic medicine", "Vedic cooking"): "knowledge", as encompassing the entire Vedic corpus including the Upanishads, the Upavedas and the Vedangas, thus meaning "the accumulated ancestral knowledge", or more or less "the tradition". This then becomes a reasonable proposition: the accumulated knowledge passed on by the ancestors is an important though not exclusive means of knowledge, due to the human reality that we cannot start discovering everything anew through personal experience within a lifetime. It is also distinctive for Hinduism along with all "Pagan" cultures, contrasting them with Christianity and Islam, and to an extent even with Buddhism. The latter category, most radically Islam, rejects ancestral culture, and takes a revolution against the tradition as its starting-point, a total rejection of the preceding age as "age of ignorance" (*jâhilîya*).

However, in Tilak's case, there is every reason to assume that he used "Veda" in the restricted sense: Brahmanic scriptures to the exclusion of all others, notably the four Samhitas ("collections": Rik, Sama, Yajus, Atharva), chanted by Brahmins since time immemorial and supposed to have an auspicious effect. In that case, the problem with Tilak's definition is that for a majority of practising Hindus, the Vedas are only a very distant presence, much less important than the stories from the Itihasa-Purana literature, the rules of conduct laid down in the Dharma-Shastras, and (often counterbalancing the latter) the teachings of the Bhakti poets.

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[9] V.D. Savarkar: *Hindutva*, p.109.

This is not because of some revolution rejecting the Vedic heritage, but simply because of the time-lapse, and also because of the jealousy with which the Brahmin caste increasingly distanced the Vedic knowledge from the masses.

In the post-Vedic millennia, there was ample room for new writings, and gradually the Veda proper was eclipsed by new Great Narratives, or new formulations of old narratives, springing from the same inspiration as the Vedas but better placed to catch the popular imagination. But at least these younger texts pay homage to the Vedas and fix them as a distant and little-known object of veneration in the collective consciousness. The most influential post-Vedic text, the Mahabharata, is explicitly rooted in the Vedic tradition, but it is younger and not guarded for the exclusive hearing of the Brahmins. Through this indirect lip-service to the Vedas, even illiterate "little traditions" in Hindu civilization can be covered by Tilak's definition. However, even in its most inclusive reading, Tilak's definition excludes important groups which many Hindu Revivalists insist on including in the Hindu fold: Buddhists, Jains, Brahmo Samajists, etc. Savarkar, before developing his own alternative, rejects Tilak's definition precisely because it is not sufficiently inclusive.

Finally, there is a decisive scriptural argument against Tilak's inclusion of "belief in the Vedas" as a criterion for Hinduism. The Puranas describe (and the Epics occasionally refer to) several dozens of generations of ancestors of the Puru-Bharata lineage which patronized the composition of the Vedas.[10] Regardless of whether we accept the historicity of those genealogies and family histories, they prove that Hindus have at least *conceived* of a pre-Vedic period in *Arya*/Hindu civilization. Thus, though the Manu-Smriti in its present version does not pre-date the Christian era, tradition ascribes it (or at least its original version) to Manu Vaivasvata, putative ancestor of all the Puranic dynasties and pre-Vedic founder of Hindu civilization, thought to have lived several generations before the first Vedic poets and a great many before the compilation of the Vedic Samhitas.[11] If the central concept of dharma is ascribed to pre-Vedic sages, if the Vedas themselves (like all ancient religious traditions) have an awareness of venerable ancestry, it follows that Hinduism conceives of itself as ultimately pre-dating the Vedas. What else could you expect of a religion which calls itself Sanatana, "eternal", Dharma?

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[10] According to the Puranas, Manu Vaivasvata, patriarch of the present human race, or at least of the Aryas, had ten successors, one of them being Sudyumna, founder of the Prayag-based Lunar dynasty (another being Ikshvaku, founder of the Ayodhya-based Solar dynasty). His great-grandson Yayati left Prayag to conquer western India, and one of his five sons, Puru, acquired the metropolitan area (East Panjab and Haryana) of the Saraswati basin where the Vedic tradition was to develop. One of his descendants (23rd generation starting from Manu) was Bharata, after whom India is named *Bhâratavarsha*.

1.2. Credal definition: Puranic Hinduism

Indologists have distinguished between Vedic religion, laid down descriptively or normatively in the Vedic text corpus, and Puranic religion, or Hinduism proper, as it developed after the Buddhist interregnum (later Maurya dynasty). The distinction is not an orientalist imposition, for Brahmins have all along made a distinction between Vedic and non-Vedic elements within the native religion, e.g. Shivaji was crowned with two ceremonies, one Vedic and one Tantric.[12]

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[11] A systematic table of dynastic lists given in the Puranas was prepared by P.L. Bhargava: *India in the Vedic Age*, reproduced in S. Talageri: *Aryan Invasion Theory and Indian Nationalism*, p.338-343. A cross-reference between these lists and the kings names appearing in the Vedas is given in Talageri: *op.cit.*, p.345-347.

[12] Vide Jadunath Sarkar: *Shivaji*, p.158-167. The rivalry between the respective priests provides a nasty example of Brahminical greed and caste pride, a frequent point of reference in the Hindutva variety of anti-Brahminism as represented by the Shiv Sena.

For all practical purposes, the Puranic tradition is now the dominant one, and many of its non-Vedic elements have replaced the corresponding Vedic elements even in circles of Vedic purists. Thus, Vedic Gods like Varuna and Indra have practically disappeared from the Hindu collective consciousness in favour of restyled minor Vedic Gods like Shiva and Vishnu and non-Vedic gods like Ganesha and Kali. The major festivals of the Hindu calendar are based on the epic feats of Rama and Krishna and on the Puranic lore pertaining to Shiva and the Goddess.

A credal definition of Hinduism commonly accepted by Western scholars is that a Hindu:

(1) believes in reincarnation,
(2) observes caste rules, and
(3) observes the taboo on cow slaughter.[13]

This is an explicitation of Mahatma Gandhi's description of his own Hinduism: "Hinduism believes in the oneness not merely of all human life; but in the oneness of all that lives. Its worship of the cow is, in my opinion, its unique contribution to the evolution of humanitarianism. (...) The great belief in transmigration is a direct consequence of that belief. Finally the discovery of the law of Varnashrama [= differentiation after age group and social function] is a magnificent result of the ceaseless search for truth."[14]

This description fits "Puranic Hinduism", usually defined as the specific form of Hinduism developed after the ascendancy of Buddhism in the Maurya period, and which has as its dominant scriptural corpora the Dharma-Shastras and the Itihasa-Purana literature. This chronology of Hindu religion is rejected by some Hindu Revivalist scholars, who claim that the Puranas contain traditions as old as the Vedas

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[13] Winand Callewaert: *India, betoverende verscheidenheid* (Dutch: "India, enchanting diversity"), p.14.

[14] M.K. Gandhi: *Hindu Dharma*, p.8.

(though also including younger material), and that Vedic tradition even in its prime should be seen as just one lineage within a much larger religious landscape which is preserved in the Puranas.[15] They point out that a work or a literature called Purana is already mentioned in Vedic literature itself.[16]

Nonetheless, we will consider these three criteria when checking whether a given tradition is Hindu or not, but not without some caveats. On all three counts, this definition is considered not to fit the pre-Buddhist Vedic religion, hence the decision of many Indologists to consider the pre-Maurya Vedic tradition and the post-Maurya Puranic tradition as two separate religions. Even in present-day Hinduism, these three criteria only fit a certain mainstream but fail to include groups of people whom anyone would call "Hindu" upon watching their religious practices, as we will see in the next paragraphs.

1.3. Caste

It is commonly believed that caste, i.e. the division of society in endogamous groups, is an exclusively Hindu institution. Thus, after briefly describing the system of the four varnas, Ambedkar writes: "This is called by the Hindus the *Varṇa Vyavasthâ*. It is the very soul of Hinduism. Without *Varṇa Vyavasthâ* there is nothing else in Hinduism to distinguish it from other religions."[17] Harold A. Gould summarizes: "Most [researchers] have found [caste] an integral and inalienable part of the Hindu religion." And he himself agrees: "This ancient social institution was the necessary sociological manifestation of the underlying moral and philosophical presuppositions of Hinduism. Without traditional Hinduism there could have been no caste system.

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[15] S. Talageri: *Aryan Invasion Theory and Indian Nationalism*, p.297 ff.

[16] Atharva-Veda 11:7:24, Satapatha Brahmana 10:5:6:8, Chandogya Upanishad 3:4:1, Kautilya Arthasastra 1:3, all quoted in S. Talageri: *Aryan Invasion Theory and Indian Nationalism*, p.298.

[17] Dr. Ambedkar: *Writings and Speeches*, vol.4, p.189.

Without the caste system traditional Hindu values would have been inexpressible."[18]

One might say that the caste system has been Hinduism's body for a long time, the concrete structure with which Hindu culture organized its social dimension. But that is something very different from saying that caste is the soul of Hinduism, its intrinsic essence. Thus, Peter van der Veer writes that caste may not be as all-pervading or intrinsic to Hinduism as is usually claimed: "The idea that caste is the basis of the Indian social order and that to be a Hindu is to be a member of a caste became an axiom in the British period. What actually happened during that period was probably a process of caste formation and more rigid systematization due to administrative and ideological pressure from the colonial system, which reminds us of the so-called 'secondary tribalization' in Africa."[19]

But in fact, castes and caste systems have developed in very divergent parts of the world, e.g. the originally ethnic division in Hutu and Tutsi in Rwanda, or the endogamous hereditary communities of blacksmiths, musicians and other occupational groups in West Africa.[20] The European division in nobility and commoners was a caste system in the full sense of the term: two endogamous groups in a hierarchical relation. When the Portuguese noticed the Indian *jâti* system, they applied to it the term *casta*, already in use for a social division in their homeland: the separate communities defined by religion, viz. Christians, Jews and Muslims. In practice, these were virtually endogamous, and there was a hierarchical relation between the top community (first Muslims, then Christians) and the other two.

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[18] Harold A. Gould: *The Sacralization of a Social Order*, p.1. This statement is at least partly circular, for "traditional" Hinduism (as opposed to anti-caste reform Hinduism) would be defined precisely as that tendency within Hinduism which upholds traditional institutions such as caste.

[19] Peter van der Veer: *Gods on Earth*, p.53.

[20] Tal Tamari: "The Development of Caste Systems in West Africa", *Journal of African History* 1991, p.221-250.

Historically, the insistence on including caste among the criteria for Hinduism is not so innocent: it was part of the British "divide and rule" strategy against the Freedom Movement. In 1910, a British official, E.A. Gait, passed a circular proposing several tests to decide who is a Hindu, regardless of whether the person concerned described himself as a Hindu: whether he worshipped the "great Hindu gods"; whether he was allowed entry into temples; whether the Brahmins who performed his family rituals were recognized as Brahmins by their supposed caste members; on what side of the untouchability divide he was. Except for the first, these criteria were calculated to exclude the lowest castes and certain sects, regardless of their beliefs and Hindu practices.

The aim was to fragment Hindu society: "Given the upper caste character of the leaders of the Swadeshi movement, this 'test' was designed to encourage the detachment of low castes from the 'Hindu' category, reducing the numbers on whose behalf the upper castes claimed to speak."[21] The "test" in effect implemented a suggestion by Muslim League leader Ameer Ali (1909) to detach the lower castes from the Hindu category. Ever since, it has remained a constant in anti-Hindu circles to maximize the importance of caste, and in Hindu Revivalist circles to work for its decrease in importance or even its ultimate abolition.

Given the existence of caste practices in non-Hindu societies, the caste phenomenon does not need Hinduism. But does Hinduism need caste? Can Hinduism exist without it? To anti-Hindu agitators, the matter is very simple: "Hinduism means caste."[22] But real life tells a different story. Among overseas Hindu communities (e.g. in South Africa, Surinam, the Netherlands), the sense of caste has waned and in many circles even disappeared, without making them any the less Hindu.[23]

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[21] Pradip Kumar Datta: "'Dying Hindus'", *Economic and Political Weekly*, 19-6-1993, p.1306.

The Arya Samaj, which has worked hard to diminish the importance of caste, argues that this is merely a return to the Vedic condition, for indeed, the "family books" (2-7) of the Rigveda, the oldest literary testimony of Hindu civilization, are silent about caste. Only in the Purusha Sukta of the Rigveda does the enumeration of the four varnas appear, without any hint that this was a caste rather than just a class system.[24] Even Dr. Ambedkar, who argues that modern Hinduism is absolutely bound up with caste, describes how Vedic society knew a class system rather than a caste system: "Particular attention has to be paid to the fact that this was essentially a class system, in which individuals, when qualified, could change their class, and therefore classes did change their personnel."[25] This is based on no more than an *argumentum e silentio*, but there may be something to it.

At any rate, hereditary varnas are a very old institution, well-attested in the Mahabharata and its most popular section, the Bhagavad-Gita. This text is frequently quoted by reformers as attesting that the four varna functions already existed, but were allotted on the basis of (not one's birth but)[26] one's *guṇa-karma*, "qualities and activities". This is a constant in Hindu revivalist discourse aimed at disentangling Hinduism from the caste system with Scriptural authority: reference is to Krishna's words in the Bhagavad-Gita: "The four varnas have been created by Me through a classification of the qualities and actions."[27]

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[22] Congress MP and Scheduled Caste member B.P. Maurya, replying to *Organiser*'s question what Hinduism is (8-9-1996). He strongly advocated conversion of Hindus to *any* other religion on the plea that they are all more egalitarian than Hinduism.

[23] In most of these communities, the Arya Samaj with its anti-caste stance has played a major role. The Arya Samaj is also a factor in the much lower intensity of caste inequality in the Arya heartland, Panjab. As Bahujan Samaj Party leader Kanshi Ram, told me (interview at BSP headquarters, Delhi 1993), he only became aware of the seriousness of caste inequality when he moved from Panjab to the more backward state of Uttar Pradesh.

[24] "The *Brâhmaṇa* was his mouth, of both his arms was the *Râjanya* made. His thighs became the *Vaishya*, from his feet the *Śûdra* was produced." (RV 10:90:12)

[25] Dr. Ambedkar: *Writings and Speeches*, vol.1, p.18.

On the other hand, in the same Gita, the curse of *varnasankara*, "mixing of varnas", is invoked as one of the terrible consequences of intra-dynastic warfare by Arjuna: "When women become corrupted, it results in the intermingling of varnas."[28] If this can still be dismissed as part of Arjuna's initial plea (for not joining the battle), which Krishna's subsequent explanation seeks to *refute*, it is harder to ignore Krishna's own statement implying a negative opinion of inter-varna marriage: "If I do not perform action, I shall become the agent of intermingling (of varnas)."[29] It seems clear that by the time of the final editing of the Gita, varna endogamy was a firmly entrenched institution. But one has to make the best of it, and so, reformers like Swami Shraddhananda have highlighted such scriptural alternatives to hereditary and endogamous caste as are available.

Observing caste rules is still the general practice among Hindus in India, yet even there it has not been accepted as a defining component of Hinduism in at least one court ruling. The Ramakrishna Mission, in its attempt to acquire non-Hindu status, had used the argument of its professed rejection of caste as proof of non-Hinduness, but the Supreme Court pointed out that abolition of caste had been the explicit programme of outspoken Hindus like Swami Dayanand Saraswati, so that Hinduism without caste did seem to be possible after all.[30]

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[26] I put these words between brackets, because they do not appear in this line of the Gita (4:13), though Hindu apologists usually pretend that they have at least been intended by Krishna.

[27] Bhagavad-Gita 4:13.

[28] Bhagavad-Gita 1:41.

[29] Bhagavad-Gita 3:24.

1.4. Sri Aurobindo on caste

The difficult relation between caste in Hindu history and modern anti-caste reform was perhaps best articulated by Sri Aurobindo. First of all, he emphasizes the confinement of caste to purely worldly affairs: "Essentially there was, between the devout Brahmin and the devout Sudra, no inequality in the single *virât purusha* [Cosmic Spirit] of which each was a necessary part. Chokha Mela, the Maratha Pariah, became the Guru of Brahmins proud of their caste purity; the Chandala taught Shankaracharya: for the Brahman was revealed in the body of the Pariah and in the Chandala there was the utter presence of Shiva the Almighty."[31] This could, of course, be dismissed as a case of "opium of the people", conceding to them a spiritual equality all the better to justify the worldly inequality.

Secondly, Aurobindo avoids the somewhat contrived attempts to deny the close connection between the specificity of Hindu civilization and the caste system: "Caste therefore was (...) a supreme necessity without which Hindu civilisation could not have developed its distinctive character or worked out its unique mission."[32] So far, he actually seems to support the line now taken by anti-Hindu authors, viz. that caste is intrinsic to Hinduism, eventhough selectively highlighting cases where low-caste people got a certain recognition in non-social, religious respects.

However, Aurobindo's third point is that social reform including the abolition of caste is equally true to the fundamental genius of Hindu civilization: "But to recognise this is not to debar ourselves from pointing out its later perversions and desiring its transformation. It is the nature of human institutions to degenerate, to lose their vitality, to decay, and the first sign of decay is the loss of flexibility and oblivion of the essential spirit in which they were conceived. The spirit is permanent, the body changes; and a body which refuses to change must die. (...) There is no doubt that the institution of caste degenerated. It ceased to be determined by spiritual qualifications which, once essential, have now come to be subordinate and even immaterial and is determined by the purely material tests of occupation and birth. By this change it has set itself against the fundamental tendency of Hinduism which is to insist on the spiritual and subordinate the material, and thus lost most of its meaning."[33]

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[30] M.D. McLean: "Are Ramakrishnaites Hindus? Some implications of recent litigation on the question", in *South Asia*, vol.14, no.2 (1991).

[31] Aurobindo (22-9-1907): *India's Rebirth*, p.27.

[32] Aurobindo (22-9-1907): *India's Rebirth*, p.27.

Chronologically, this position could use some corrections (was the low status of the Chandala who spoke to Shankara not a symptom of an already advanced "degeneration"?), but we get the picture: the caste system may have been right in some past age, but now Hindu society should adapt to the modern age. This evaluation by Aurobindo proved to be trend-setting and is now very common in Hindutva discourse.

1.5. Caste as a non-violent integrator

The institution of caste *is* now eroding, first by the amalgamation of closely related castes, and marginally, slowly but surely, even by the intermarriage of people from very divergent ranks in the caste hierarchy. Interdining with people of unequal caste rank, a revolutionary act in the British period, has become commonplace. Even the priesthood is open to members of lower castes in an increasing number of temples. The RSS was instrumental in fighting the rejection of S. Rajesh, an RSS-affiliated low-caste candidate for the priesthood in a Shiva temple (Kongarapilly, Kerala), in court; the verdict upheld the candidate's rights.[34] The fact that judicial interventions are needed proves that there is still some way to go; on the other hand, the fact that people challenge caste privileges in court, as a last resort after challenging them in civil society, and that they succeed, proves that caste is losing ground, and this without entailing the disintegration of Hinduism.

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[33] Aurobindo (22-9-1907): *India's Rebirth*, p.27.

Though trying to discover a basis in Hindu tradition for casteless equality (as the Arya Samaj claims to have found in the Vedas) is a good thing, it should not keep us from understanding why Hinduism could accommodate the caste system so well. One underlying Hindu value is that of *ahiṁsâ*, "non-violence", not in its extreme Gandhian sense (when slapped, turn the other cheek), but in the subtler sense of respecting every entity, not upsetting but preserving it.

To preserve the distinctive character and tradition of a community, caste separatism was extremely helpful. Thus, in China the Jews were not persecuted, yet they disappeared because of intermarriage; in India, in spite of their small numbers, they remained a distinctive community, thanks to their caste separateness. Hinduism profoundly respects worldly difference and distinctiveness, and while that cannot justify the atrocities which have been committed in the name of caste, it does help to explain why Hindus could maintain the system with a perfectly good conscience for so long. So, in one sense, it is undeniable that caste resonates profoundly with the Hindu world-view; but the point is that Hinduism has more arrows in its quiver.

To put it differently, there is one intrinsic aspect of Hindu culture for which the caste system was an eminently useful (though not strictly necessary) social framework: the fabled Hindu tolerance. It is one thing to say that Hindu society has received the persecuted Jewish, Syrian Christian and Parsi communities well, but another to devise a system that allowed them to retain their identity and yet integrate into Hindu society. Whatever else one may think about the caste system, it is a fact that it facilitated the integration of separate communities.

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[34] "Caste no bar to be Hindu priest", *Times of India*, 8-12-1995.

This very process of integration of separate communities with respect for their distinct identity is at least a part of how the caste system came into being: by gradually integrating endogamous tribal communities in such a way that they could retain their identity, with only minor changes in their traditions. Dr. Ambedkar has drawn attention to this structural continuity between caste and tribe:

"The racial theory of Untouchability not only runs counter to the results of anthropometry, but it also finds very little support from such facts as we know about the ethnology of India. That the people of India were once organized on tribal basis is well-known, and although *the tribes have become castes*, the tribal organization still remains intact. Each tribe was divided into clans and the clans were composed of groups of families."[35]

And this tribal structure continues in the system of endogamous castes divided in exogamous clans (*gotra*), indicating that caste is in fact a continuation of tribal organization in a supra-tribal or post-tribal society.

Likewise, the British indologist J.L. Brockington correctly argues that one of the prime functions of caste "has been to assimilate various tribes and sects and by assigning them a place in the social hierarchy", so Hinduism and caste do have a long common history, without being identical: "To the extent that Hinduism is as much a social system as a religion, the caste system has become integral to it. But (...) in Hinduism outside India, caste is withering. More significantly, some elements in India would deny its validity; the devotional movement in general tends towards the rejection of caste (...) The limitation on such attitudes to caste is that in general they were confined to the distinctly religious field, but that only reinforces the point here being made that *caste, though intimately connected with Hinduism, is not necessary to it*".[36]

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[35] B.R. Ambedkar: *Writings and Speeches*, vol.1, p.303. Emphasis added.

Later on, Brockington gives the example of Virashaivism, a sect intended as casteless, founded in 13th-century Karnataka by the Brahmin politician Basava: "Yet, despite Basava's rejection of the Vedas and the caste system, along with so many other characteristic features of Hinduism, the Lingayat movement has remained a part, though admittedly an unorthodox part, of Hinduism."[37]

Even at the height of his egalitarian innovation, Basava never called himself a "non-Hindu" (because such terminology was not yet in use), and he remained faithful to Hindu *religious* practices, starting with the worship of Shiva. He did promote intermarriage for one or two generations, i.e. a caste equality which was more than merely spiritual. Very soon, his sect simply became one more high and proud Hindu caste, which it has remained till today. Its egalitarianism lasted but a brief moment. This may be sufficient to serve as a selling proposition in the modern religion market, at least among people who go by historical anecdote rather than living social practice. On the other hand, a non-cynical approach of this heritage would be, to say that the hour for the awakening of a long-dormant ideal of casteless Shaivism has struck.[38]

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[36] J.L. Brockington: *The Sacred Thread: A Short History of Hinduism*, p.3.

[37] J.L. Brockington: *The Sacred Thread*, p.148.

[38] See e.g. J.P. Schouten: *Revolution of the Mystics. On the Social Aspects of Virashaivism*; at least for historical data, for in its interpretation, it overstates the egalitarian "revolution" of Basava, in the usual Christian tactic of reducing everything Hindu to caste, wholly caste and nothing but caste. Basava was an ardent Shiva worshipper, to the extent of feeling close enough to Shiva to neglect the worldly conventions outside. Virashaiva castelessness and unconcern for purity rules (e.g. in case of menstrual "impurity") results from an intense religious, viz. Shaiva-Hindu, enthusiasm. For a first-hand account of Virashaivism, I thank my old friend Shambo Linga, who spent seven years as the live-in pupil of a traditional Virashaiva Guru. He told me how a government official had to intervene in a Virashaiva-run village school in order to stop caste discrimination, with Virashaiva children sitting on a platform and others on the ground. Equality: a long way to go even for self-proclaimed egalitarians.

Along with the persistence of living Hinduism among non-resident Indians who have shed their caste identities, this illustrates how Hinduism can survive caste. Likewise, it has also been amply documented how caste can survive Hinduism: converts to Christianity or Islam tend to maintain caste divisions even when they have long given up the supposed Hindu basis of caste: belief in Shastras or in the doctrine of Karma.

1.6. Untouchability

A typical aspect of the Hindu caste system is the notion of *purity*, unattested as such in the Vedas.[39] Here again, we find the same phenomenon in divergent cultures, e.g. Islam has a distinct notion of purity and impurity, and requires purity before offering prayers, just like Hinduism. Islam also considers unbelievers impure, though they are free to become Muslims and shed their impurity. It is only the coupling of the hereditary character of caste with the notion of impurity which yields a typically Hindu institution: hereditary untouchability. The genesis of this institution has not been definitively reconstructed yet, though it is a matter of prime importance for understanding Hindu history.

It is at any rate not due to the much-maligned "Aryans", who originally had no such notion whether in India or abroad. Neither do the Vedic Samhitas contain any reference to Untouchability; Vedic Hinduism, at least, could exist without untouchability. The Dravidians, by contrast, seem to have had the notion in complete form: "Before the coming of the Aryan ideas (...) the Tamils believed that any taking of life was dangerous, as it released the spirits of the things that were killed. Likewise, all who dealt with the dead or with dead substances from the body were considered to be charged with the power of death and were thought to be dangerous. Thus, long before the coming of the Aryans with their notion of *varna*, the Tamils had groups that were considered low and dangerous and with whom contact was closely regulated."[40]

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[39] For an analysis of the notion of purity, see the path-breaking study (e.g. the first to discern the rationale behind Biblical purity rules, p.51-57) of Mary Douglas: *Purity and Danger*, esp. p.8 and p.123-128.

Gerhard Schweitzer reports that even the orthodox are uncomfortable with the Untouchability category: "The untouchables have not been noticed in any of the sacred scriptures. As Mahatma Gandhi said in an oft-quoted statement: if he were to find even a single text passage in the Vedas or the great Hindu epics which justified the abomination of Untouchability, he would no longer want to be a Hindu. For lack of historical source material, it is completely unknown when this greater category of 'Untouchables' on the lowest rungs of the social ladder was established. No high-caste author of the past millennium seems to have found it necessary to discuss the question in any form in his writings. Probably this greater category has only come into being during the 8th or 9th century, so it is truly a young phenomenon."[41]

In today's urban Hinduism, the practice of untouchability (unlike the practice of caste endogamy) is disappearing, yet that does not mean that Hinduism is disappearing. Indeed, it is the Hindu nationalists' boast that in their meetings and group activities, there is no trace of untouchability or caste discrimination.[42]

So, caste may be included as a criterion for defining Hinduism in a purely descriptive sense when discussing Hindu society in the classical and medieval period (which in India is reckoned as lasting into the 19th century), though Hindu religion can and does exist without it. Of untouchability, even this need not be conceded: its presence in Hindu history is considerably more limited than the caste system, and there is plenty of Hindu history which would wrongly be labelled "non-Hindu" if untouchability were accepted as a criterion. Though contemporary anti-Brahmin polemic in media like *Dalit Voice* tends to fuse all social phenomena of Hindu civilization into a single ("evil Brahminical") design, a more historical attitude is recommended: one which explores the exact and probably separate origins of untouchability and caste, just as within the institution of caste, social rank/varna and endogamy/jati may have separate origins.

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[40] George L. Hart, III: "The Theory of Reincarnation among the Tamils", in W. Doniger: *Karma and Rebirth*, p.117.

[41] Gerhard Schweizer: *Indien*, Stuttgart 1995, p.97 ff., reproduced in Joachim Betz: "Indien", *Informationen zur politischen Bildung* no.257/ 1997, p.24.

[42] The RSS likes to quote Mahatma Gandhi's appreciation of the absence of untouchability at RSS Shakhas, e.g. *RSS Spearheading National Renaissance*, p.23.

1.7. Arun Shourie on the abolition of Untouchability

Untouchability has been outlawed (1950), and even before that, it was losing ground. As Arun Shourie has observed, "reformers like Swami Vivekananda, like Gandhiji, like Narayan Guru had had no difficulty in showing that Untouchability had no sanction in our scriptures, that, on the contrary, the conclusive doctrinal argument lay in the central proposition of the scriptures themselves: namely, that all was Brahman, that the same soul inhered in all. There was also the historical fact that whatever might have been the excrescences which had grown around or in the name of Hinduism, the entire and long history of the religion showed that it was uniquely receptive to new ideas, that it was uniquely responsive to reformers, that it was adaptable as no other religion was, and therefore there was no reason to believe that it would not reform itself out of this evil also."[43]

Incidentally, I don't think that Shourie's reference to the vision of the same soul inhering in all (any more than the vision that all are created by the same God) provides a sufficient ground for equality in social practice. At any rate it doesn't remove the real-life inequality between human beings and animals, so it can also co-exist with inequality between nobles and commoners, between priests and laymen, between Banias and Chandalas. But the point is that both ancient scriptures and modern Hindu reformers could perfectly do without the institution of untouchability without being any the less Hindu for it.

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[43] A. Shourie: *Worshipping False Gods*, p.230. Shourie is arguing against Dr. Ambedkar's view that Untouchability is of the essence of Hinduism.

Arun Shourie tells us that a lot can be learned from the case of Narayan Guru who, early this century, as a member of the unapproachable Ezhava caste in Kerala, became an acknowledged religious leader and profoundly changed caste relations in Kerala for the better.[44] He "attained the highest spiritual states, thereby acquired unquestioned authority, and transformed society from within the tradition".[45] He made use of a major loophole in the rigidities of the caste system, a loophole which Hindu society deliberately maintained precisely because Hinduism was not merely a social system but, among other things, also a spiritual system: renunciates in general, and sages with acknowledged yogic realization in particular, are above the worldly divisions such as caste. They also have the authority to herald social transformations which Hindus would never accept from purely political busybodies.

As you can verify from any publisher's book list, Narayan Guru is not very popular among Indian secularists and foreign India-watchers, quite unlike that other Untouchable, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar: "today, scarcely anyone outside Kerala even knows about Narayan Guru", while by contrast, "Ambedkar's statues outnumber those of Gandhiji".[46] Narayan Guru upsets the now-dominant Ambedkarite description of Hindu tradition as a den of caste oppression beyond redemption.

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[44] Vide P. Parameswar: *Narayan Guru.*

[45] From the cover text of A. Shourie: *Worshipping False Gods.*

[46] From the cover text of A. Shourie: *Worshipping False Gods.*

Unlike secular people who were insensitive to the spiritual dimension, such as Dr. Ambedkar and Ramaswamy Naicker, "Narayan Guru consistently taught against conversion, he himself took back into the Hindu fold persons from the lower castes who had gone over to other religions".[47] And the contrast with Ambedkar's Dalit movement persists when we study the long-term results: "The legacy of Narayan Guru is a society elevated, in accord, the lower classes educated and full of dignity and a feeling of self-worth. The legacy of Ambedkar is a bunch screaming at everyone, a bunch always demanding and denouncing, a bunch mired in self-pity and hatred, a society at war with itself."[48]

Though there is still some way to go, it is nonsense to claim that nothing in caste relations has changed, especially after ex-Untouchables have become Deputy Prime Minister (Jagjivan Ram, 1977-79), President (K.R. Narayanan, 1997-) and chairman of the ruling party (Bangaru Laxman, BJP, 1999-2000). This evolution provides an opportunity to test the dominant theory that Hinduism cannot exist without caste: has Hinduism diminished in proportion with the losses which caste inequality has suffered? The problems besetting Hinduism are most definitely not due to the withering away of untouchability. On the contrary, recent conversions to Islam have typically happened in areas like Meenakshipuram (1981) where discriminations of the Scheduled Castes are still severe, e.g. where they are harassed by unscrupulous policemen and seek safety by acceding to the Muslim community.[49] Hinduism has everything to gain by liquidating caste inequality as quickly as possible.

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[47] A. Shourie: *Worshipping False Gods*, p.381. About "Periyar" Ramaswamy Naicker, see Amulya Ganguli: "The atheist tradition", *Indian Express*, 20-9-1995, and M.D. Gopalakrishnan: *Periyar, Father of the Tamil Race*.

[48] A. Shourie: *Worshipping False Gods*, p.381. The last sentence refers to the foul language, violent ways and infighting among the low-caste parties claiming Ambedkar's legacy. Christian missionaries likewise report that communities converted to Christianity have progressed much more in the last half century than the castes which have followed Dr. Ambedkar into neo-Buddhism or into Dalit activism.

1.8. Belief in reincarnation

The Bhagavad-Gita, often called the "fifth Veda" and explicitly paying respects to the Vedas, contains an explicit affirmation of the doctrine of karma and reincarnation. This doctrine is not attested in the Veda proper (which hints at an afterlife not unlike the Germanic *Walhalla* or the Greek *Elysean Fields*), and is only *in statu nascendi* in the great Upanishads, eventhough there are sophisticated hypotheses detailing the deeper origins of this doctrine in the Vedic doctrine of sacrifice.[50] At any rate—and here we introduce an element which must be taken into account in any definition of Hinduism—, Hinduism is not a belief system. Its rules extend to behaviour (*âchâra*), not to opinion (*vichâra*). Therefore, although "belief in reincarnation" is indeed quite common among Hindus (and Sikhs and Buddhists), it is questionable as a defining characteristic of Hinduism, modern or ancient.[51]

Thus, Ananda Coomaraswamy, one of the most accurate and profound 20th-century exponents of Hindu thought, did not believe in individual reincarnation: with an appeal to Shankara, he thought that "only Brahman reincarnates", not some individual soul.[52] Within Hindu tradition, this is a somewhat simplistic view when compared to the doctrine of the "causal body", which as carrier of the accumulated karma defines the individual soul as distinct from the universal Brahman-consciousness. On the bright side, this simplicity yields a more robust view of human destiny than the awkwardly moralistic Puranic belief in an individual soul being rewarded or punished for its past deeds, a belief which deprives all good and bad events in life of their innocence by employing them in a cosmic calculus of retribution.[53] Indeed, the Upanishadic doctrine of the Self (*âtman*), which transcends all individual distinction, may even be read as the very opposite in spirit of the theory of reincarnation, which extends individuality (*jîva*) beyond this life-time to near-eternity.

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[49] One of several more recent cases was reported in *Indian Express*, 12-2-1995 and in *Young India*, July 1995: police excesses have triggered off conversions of Pradhi tribals in central India to Islam. A local leader declared: "Now they have started laying hands on our women. We cannot tolerate this. The only way to resist the continued torment is to embrace Islam. Conversion to Islam would earn the Pradhis the support of a community which can act as a pressure group."

[50] E.g. Herman W. Tull: *The Vedic Origins of Karma.*

[51] One of the best concise explanations of the theory of reincarnation is by E. Krishnamacharya: *Our Heritage*, p.67-74.

[52] A.K. Coomaraswamy: *Metaphysics*, p.74, p.80, p.347n.

Frits Staal observes: "A Hindu (...) can but need not believe in reincarnation or rebirth, or if he believes in them, he may interpret it in so many ways that it is not clear whether there is a common element in all these diverse notions."[54] The Hindu view of afterlife and reincarnation has evolved over the centuries, and it would be wrong to pin "Hinduism" down on any single one of the stages in this development. Belief in reincarnation may be found among the majority of contemporary Hindus and could be used as a valid indication but not as a decisive criterion.

1.9. Caste and reincarnation

It has often been said that the belief in reincarnation is a cornerstone of the caste system. For instance, Christian author Dr. J. Verkuyl writes: "...the caste system in India has always been officially justified and legitimized by the doctrine of karma. Someone's birth in a higher or a lower caste or as an outcaste was the consequence of the law of karma."[55] But the fact is that many other societies have known the doctrine of reincarnation (e.g. the Druze of West Asia) without setting up a division in endogamous groups, or at least without deriving the need for such a division from this belief.

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[53] Vide e.g. K. Elst: *De niet-retributieve Karma-leer* (Dutch: "The non-retributive Karma Doctrine").

[54] F. Staal: *Een Wijsgeer in het Oosten*, p.107.

[55] J. Verkuyl: *De New Age Beweging*, p.71.

It is especially remarkable that Buddhism has brought the notion of reincarnation and karma to most of East Asia, without thereby creating a caste system in those countries. To be sure, Buddhism never had the intention of reforming the Chinese, Japanese, Burmese etc. societies in any direction, and it fully cooperated with and integrated into the existing feudal and monarchical establishments in these countries; but if caste were "the necessary sociological manifestation of the moral and philosophical presuppositions of Hinduism"[56], among which reincarnation and karma are certainly considered the foremost, then these same notions, even when labelled "Buddhist", should have had the same effect on those other societies.

One might reply that the Buddhist notion of reincarnation is not entirely the same, as Buddhism "does not believe in the Self", but that distinction is purely academic. Commoners belonging to both Hinduism and Buddhism take the karma doctrine as a ground for fatalism: you have deserved what you are getting, so don't complain. People with more philosophical education take it as a ground for activism: you make your own fate, so do your best. Practically all of them, excepting a handful of scriptural purists, take reincarnation as an individual process, as a journey of an individual Self directed towards its temporary destiny by its specific load of karma. The Jatakas describe the previous incarnations of the Shakyamuni Buddha; the Dalai Lama (and all the other institutionally reincarnating lamas or *Tulkus*) is believed to be always the same individual reincarnating, etc.: in actual practice, Buddhists have the same understanding of reincarnation as Hindus have, relative to their level of education and inclination to purism.

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[56] Harold A. Gould: *The Sacralization of a Social Order*, p.1.

And yet, in countries at some distance from India where Buddhism became the state religion, it has not built the same social system. That is because the Buddhist notion of reincarnation does not motivate people to build a particular type of society rather than another one, just like the Hindu notion of reincarnation is not the cause of India's particular type of society either. It is simply wrong to deduce an entire social system from abstract metaphysical notions like *karma.*

1.10. Taboo on cow-slaughter, or: are the Untouchables Hindus?

As for the taboo on cow slaughter, this is definitely accepted by most committed Hindus (including the Sikhs, but not all tribals) as an intrinsic element of their religion, at least in the last twenty centuries or so. Anyone not observing this taboo is *ipso facto* untouchable. That is why the Muslim invaders made forced converts eat beef, to prevent them from being reintegrated in their castes afterwards. Here again, what counts is not belief but behaviour: Jain scriptures are not particularly fussy about cows as distinct from other animals, but since the Jains don't eat *any* kind of meat, they are untainted by beef and hence not untouchable.

The question whether the Vedic seers practised cow-slaughter is hotly debated among Hindu revivalists and traditionalists.[57] Even the Hindu Revivalist historian K.S. Lal quotes Arabic writer Albiruni (ca. AD 1000) with approval, when he relates about the Hindus: "for they say that many things which are now forbidden were allowed before the coming of Vasudeva, e.g. the flesh of cows".[58] It is certain that the cow was a sacred animal to the authors of the Vedas, but it may be precisely because of that sacredness that the cow was sacrificed and eaten on special occasions. Indeed, P.V. Kane, the great expert on Dharma Shastra, has written: "It was not that the cow was not sacred in Vedic times, it was because of her sacredness that it is ordained in the *Vâjasaneyî Samhitâ* that beef should be eaten."[59]

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[57] The classic (though intemperate) summary of evidence for Vedic cow slaughter is B.R. Ambedkar: *Hindus Ate Beef.* However, the opposite case also has its erudite defenders: in his book *Sânskrtik Asmitâ kî Pratîk Gomâtâ* (Hindi: "Mother Cow, Symbol of Cultural Identity"), Rameshwar Mishra Pankaj argues in favour of the Vedic origin of the cow's immunity.

At any rate, by modern consensus the Vedic Aryans ate beef, and if the tribals are not Hindus on this ground, then neither were the Vedic Aryans. It is perfectly possible to worship the Hindu Gods but not to observe the Hindu purity rules, of which the taboo on beef is one; that was historically the situation of the untouchable castes, who by their profession violated the taboo on handling dead and decomposing substances (cobbler, barber, washer, sweeper, funeral worker). If you stick to such taboos as defining characteristics of a Hindu, then untouchables are not Hindus. Anti-Hindu campaigners do indeed apply this logic, to lop off as many parts as possible from Hindu society.[60] This would mean that many westernized modern Hindus should also be subtracted from the Hindu fold, along with the Vedic seers.

However, as even Christian missionaries admit, "the deep-rooted personal attachment of the Dalits to the Hinduised form of their ancestral gods and goddesses (...) make[s] any mass exodus of the Dalits out of Hinduism unlikely."[61] In a religious sense, the Dalits practise Hinduism; a definition of Hinduism which ignores this, is a bad definition. It is only logical to include all those who worship the Hindu Gods or who perform Hindu rituals in the Hindu category. Hinduism is certainly larger than the tradition of theistic worship of Gods like Shiva, Durga, Rama or local Goddesses, but at least it must include that devotional tradition. I know quite a few westernized Hindus who eat meat including beef, but who practise Hindu rituals, marry their daughters to fellow Hindus etc.; in what religious category would you put them, if not under the heading "Hindu"?

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[58] K.S. Lal: *Growth of Scheduled Tribes*, p.102, quoting Albiruni: *India*, vol.1, p.107. Albiruni uses it as an example of how the Hindu laws, unlike the Shari'a, are open to change. *Vâsudeva* is Krishna, the cow-herd. The depth and nature of the revolution brought about by Krishna in the Vedic tradition is still insufficiently understood by Indologists including myself.

[59] P.V. Kane: *Dharma Shastra Vichar*, p.180; quoted by Dr. Ambedkar: *The Untouchables*, Ch.11, in *Writings and Speeches*, vol.7., p.324.

[60] Such is the stated position of the Bangalore fortnightly *Dalit Voice*: "Dalits are not Hindus". The term *Dalit*, "broken, oppressed", was first used by the Arya Samaj to designate the untouchable Scheduled Castes in their campaign for *dalitoddhâra*, "upliftment of the oppressed". The term has now largely pushed out the allegedly paternalistic Gandhian term *Harijan*, "people of God", which only unyielding Gandhians like Arun Shourie keep on using.

That indeed is how the historical leader of the Untouchables, Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar, saw it. In the 1930s, when the British pressed him to champion their plans for institutional separation of the Depressed Classes from the Hindu category, Ambedkar declared that the Untouchables were a "separate community", though practising the "same religion" as the caste Hindus, comparing their separateness to the separateness of the European nations in spite of their common religion.[62] Though he hated Hinduism, he admitted that he was born as a Hindu, an Untouchable Hindu, that his community "worship the same Gods and Goddesses as the rest of Hindus, they go to the same places of pilgrimage, hold the same supernatural beliefs and regard the same stones, trees, mountains as sacred as the rest of the Hindus do".[63] He deduced quite logically that it would take a formal conversion including an explicit repudiation of Hinduism (which he performed shortly before his death in 1956) for him to become a non-Hindu, in his case a Buddhist.

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[61] A. Ayrookuzhiel: "The Dalit Church's Mission: a Dalit Perspective", *Indian Missiological Review*, Sep. 1996, p.44.

[62] B.R. Ambedkar: *Writings and Speeches*, vol.9, p.184-185; discussed in A. Shourie: *Worshipping False Gods*, p.227-228.

1.11. Conclusion

Let us conclude this section with an instance of the pragmatic way in which a leading Hindu Revivalist philosopher deals with the admittedly intricate question of "who exactly is a Hindu?" As we just saw, criteria like taboo on beef-eating or belief in reincarnation might stamp the Vedic seers as non-Hindus. This point is exploited by people who want to diminish the semantic extension of the term "Hindu", e.g. by spokesmen of the Ramakrishna Mission when they were trying to get their organization reclassified as a non-Hindu minority. Swami Hiranmayananda asked a number of semi-rhetorical questions which were nonetheless pertinent, e.g.: "I want to know something from Shri Ram Swarup. Were the Vedic people Hindus?" Of course, the term was not in existence yet, so the Vedic people certainly didn't *call* themselves Hindus. But *were* they Hindus? This is Ram Swarup's answer:

"Well, firstly, I would answer this question by putting a counter-question: 'Were they non-Hindus? Were they Muslims? Were they Ramakrishnaites?' Secondly, I would say that (...) they were (...) people who in later days became better known as Hindus. People have more names than one and sometimes old names are dropped or forgotten and new names given or adopted. Thirdly, (...) though we may not be able to say whether the Vedic people were Hindus, we quite well know that 'the religion of the Vedas is the religion of the Hindus', to put it in the language of Swami Vivekananda. This kind of looking at the problem is good enough. It was good enough for Vivekananda, and it should be good enough for any serious purpose."[64] Indeed, the question whether the Vedic seers were Hindus is a contrived one, and Hinduism can flourish without bothering about it.

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[63] B.R. Ambedkar: *Writings and Speeches*, vol.9, p.184.

[64] Ram Swarup: "In reply to Swami Hiranmayananda", *Organiser*, 8-10-1995; Hiranmayanada's article had appeared on 24-9-1995.

2. Hindus as "Indian Pagans"

2.1. Historical definition of "Hindu"

In Hindu scriptures, the word "Hindu" is not to be found. Yet, long before Western scholars sat down to invent definitions of "Hindu", the term already carried a definite meaning. The normal procedure ought to be, to listen to this original version first. It was brought into India by the Islamic invaders, and meant: "Indian Pagan".

The term "Hindu" is the Persian equivalent of the Indo-Aryan term "Sindhu", "river", "the Indus". The equivalence is a simple application of the regular phonetic relation between the Indo-Aryan and Iranian branches of the Indo-European language family: initial */s/* is retained in Indo-Aryan but changed into */h/* in Iranian, while aspirated voiced stops like */dh/* are retained in Indo-Aryan but lose their aspiration in Iranian. The Iranians used the word *Hindu* to designate the river Sindhu and the countries and populations situated around and beyond the Sindhu. From Persian, the Greeks borrowed the river name as *Indos* and the people's name as *Indoi*, hence English *Indus, India, Indian.*

Indians in Southeast-Asia were never known as "Hindu", but the Arabs, Turks, Mongolians and other northern and western foreigners adopted the Persian name as their own word for "India" and "Indians", e.g. Arabic *Hind*, Turkish *Hindistan.* Xuan Zang (Huen Tsang, 7th century AD), who had entered India through Persian-speaking Central Asia, notes in so many words that the name *Xin-du* (regular

Chinese rendering of Persian *Hindu*)[1] or, as he corrects it, *Yin-du*, is used outside India but is unknown within the country, because the natives call it Aryadesh or Brahmarashtra.[2] As Sita Ram Goel comments: "It may thus be said that the word 'Hindu' had acquired a national connotation, since the days of the Avesta, although in the eyes of only the foreigners."[3] In the next paras, we summarize his findings about the prehistory of the current term *Hindu*.

When Buddhism was implanted in Central Asia, and Buddhist temples were built for worship of Buddha-statues, the Mazdeans described the enthusiasts of this Indian religion as *but-parast*, "Buddha-worshippers", as opposed to the Mazdean *âtish-parast* or "fire-worshippers". The term *but-parast* came to mean more generally "idol-worshipper", for by the time of the Muslim invasions, *but* had become the generic term for "idol", hence *but-khana*, "idol-temple", and *but-shikan*, "idol-breaker". They made no distinction between the different sects based in India, and by the time the persianized Arabs and Turks invaded India, the word *but-parast* was randomly applied to all Indian unbelievers. Seeing that the Brahmins had fire-ceremonies just like the Mazdeans, the Muslims occasionally included the Indian Pagans in the category *âtish-parast* as well, again without bothering about distinctions between different sects.

The Muslim invaders called the Pagans of India sometimes "Kafirs", unbelievers in general, i.e. the same religious designation which was used for the polytheists of Arabia; but often they called them "Hindus", inhabitants of Hindustan, i.e. an ethnic-geographical designation. Thereby, they gave a fixed religious content to this geographical term: a Hindu is any Indian who is not a Jew, Christian, Muslim or Zoroastrian. In other words: any Indian "Pagan", i.e. one who is not a believer in the Abrahamic religions nor an Iranian Pagan, is a Hindu. In its definition as "Indian Paganism", Hinduism includes the whole range from animal worship to Upanishadic monist philosophy, and from Shaktic blood sacrifice to Jain extreme non-violence.

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[1] The Chinese transcription letter <x>, now pronounced as cerebral [sh], often stems from an original strongly aspirated /h/, /x/. In modern Chinese, India's name is rendered as *Yin-du*, on the basis of the non-aspirated pronunciation proposed by Xuan Zang himself.

[2] Surendranath Sen: *India through Chinese Eyes*, p.59.

[3] S.R. Goel: *Hindu Temples*, vol.2 (2nd ed.), p.396. The chapter concerned has also been published separately: *Hindus and Hinduism, Manipulation of Meanings* (1993).

The term *Hindu* was used for all Indians who were unbelievers or idol-worshippers, including Buddhists, Jains, "animists" and later the Sikhs, but in contradistinction to Indian Christians (*ahl-i Nasâra* or *Isâî*), Jews (*ahl-i-Yahûd* or *banû Isrâîl*), Mazdeans (*ahl-i Majûs* or *âtish-parast*) and of course Muslims themselves. This way, at least by the time of Albiruni (early 11th century), the word *Hindu* had a distinct religio-geographical meaning: a Hindu is an Indian who is not a Muslim, Jew, Christian or Zoroastrian.[4]

2.2. An unambiguous criterion

The Hindus never described themselves as "Hindus", until Muslim invaders came and designated them by this Persian term.[5] It does not follow that those whom we would call Hindus in retrospect had no sense of pan-Hindu cultural unity, as some might hastily conclude; merely that the term *Hindu* was not yet in use. Similarly, the Hindus called these newcomers *Turks*, but this does not exclude recognition of their religious specificity as *Muslims*. On the contrary, even Timur, who made it absolutely clear in his memoirs that he came to India to wage a religious war against the Unbelievers, and who freed the Muslim captives from a conquered city before putting the Hindu remainder to the sword, referred to his own forces as "the Turks", an ethnic designation, rather than "the Muslims".[6] One should not confuse the term with the concept: the absence of the term *Hindu* does not prove the non-existence of a concept later enunciated as "Hindu Dharma".

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[4] The pre-modern existence of the term "Hindu" was conceded, before a disappointed audience of Indologists (who habitually teach and write that Hinduism is a recent "Orientalist construct") by Prof. David Lorenzen, in a paper about the definition of "Hindu" read at the 1995 South Asia Conference in Madison, Wisconsin.

[5] I forego discussion of various crank propositions by Hindus to explain *Hindu* as a Sanskrit word, e.g. that Hindu is derived from Sanskrit *hîna*, "humble" (as in *Hînayâna*, "the lesser vehicle"), or Xuan Zang's little idea that it was derived from *indu*, "moon".

On the other hand, to those who insist that there was no Hindu identity before, the genesis of the label *Hindu* should suggest an analogy with the secularist narrative of the genesis of Indian nationhood: Indians didn't exist, but Indian nationhood was forged in the crucible of the common struggle against the British.[7] Likewise, if Hinduism had been non-existent before, then nothing would have been as effective in creating a common sense of Hindu-ness as being targeted together by the same enemy, British or Muslim. As Veer Savarkar wrote: "The [Islamic] enemies hated us as Hindus and the whole family of peoples and races, sects and creeds that flourished from Attock to Cuttack was suddenly individualised into a single Being."[8] This is not historical in its details, but it is nonetheless in agreement with a widespread view of how nations are created: by a common experience, such as the deeply involving experience of war against a common enemy.

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[6] An English translation of Timur's autobiography, *Malfuzat-i-Timuri*, is given in Elliott & Dowson: *History of India*, vol.3, 389-477. Likewise, in the Yugoslav civil war, the Serbs referred to the Muslims as "Turks", though what they meant was not Turkish-speaking people but people professing Islam.

[7] Not that I believe this narrative. That Indian nationhood originates elsewhere than in the freedom struggle is implied in the fact that the Indian nation was by no means united in that struggle: numerous Indians wholeheartedly collaborated with the British. But this does not deny their common nationhood either, just as the division of the French in collaborators and resisters under the German occupation (1940-44) does not prove the non-existence of the French nation.

[8] V.D. Savarkar: *Hindutva*, p.45.

So, a Hindu was by definition not a member of the Abrahamic religions, nor of Persian quasi-monotheist Paganism (Mazdeism, better known as Zoroastrianism). But a Buddhist, a Jain, a tribal, they were all included in the semantic domain of the term *Hindu*. Though the early Muslim writers in India had noticed a superficial difference between Brahmins and Buddhists, calling the latter "clean-shaven Brahmins", they did not see an opposition between "Hindus and Buddhists" or between "Hindus and tribals", nor did later Muslim rulers see an opposition between "Hindus and Sikhs". On the contrary, Albiruni lists Buddhists among the idolatrous Hindu sects: he describes how the idols of Vishnu, Surya, Shiva, the "eight mothers" and the Buddha are worshipped by the Bhagavatas c.q. the Magians, the Sadhus, the Brahmins and the Shramans.[9]

All Indians who were not Parsis, Jews, Christians or Muslims, were automatically Hindus. So, the original definition of Hindu is: an Indian Pagan. Since the earliest use of the term *Hindu* in India, a clear definition has been given with it, and of every community it can easily be decided whether it fits that definition or not. It does not matter if you do not like the name-tag: if you fit the definition, you fall within the Hindu category. The Hindus have not chosen to be called Hindus: others have conceived the term and its definition, and Hindus simply found themselves carrying this label and gradually accepted it.

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[9] Albiruni: *India*, vol.1, p.121. He attributes the division of men into sects to none other than Rama. "Magians" are Maga Brahmins, who are indeed worshippers of Surya, the sun; the "eight mothers" are the *ashṭa-Lakshmî*, usually depicted along with the Sri Yantra (four upward and five downward triangles intertwined), and worshipped e.g. in the Math of the Kanchi Shankaracharya.

Like in the census category manipulations of E.A. Gait, this definition implies a "test" by which we can decide whether someone is a Hindu, regardless of whether he uses or accepts that label himself. The difference is that here, the test was not made up *ad hoc* to prove a point. It is an authentic definition, generated by the real-life encounter of the Muslim invaders with their Other: the native Indian Pagans.

2.3. What is Paganism?

The term *Pagan* is generally used for people not belonging to the Abrahamic religions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam. But better than mere convention, there could be a definition of the term *Pagan*. And this definition is readily suggested by the basic meaning of the word. Like its Germanic equivalent *Heathen*, the Latin word *Paganus* literally means: rural. Christianity started as a strictly urban movement, and only after it had taken power in the Roman Empire in 313 AD did it start to conquer the countryside.[10]

The association of Christian with urban, Pagan with rural, is more than just a historical accident. It is perfectly logical that Paganism originated in natural surroundings, long before man lived in cities, and that Christianity spread in cities, where a large population was concentrated. The reason is that Paganism is based on immediate reality, on mankind's experience of the life cycles, the powers of nature, the celestial phenomena: anyone living anywhere can be struck with wonder by these realities. By contrast, Christianity is something which has never been discovered by anyone: you must have heard about it from someone, from preachers who went to the market-place where they could find a large audience.

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[10] Another meaning sometimes given to *Paganism*, and not further considered here, is the religious attachment to "material" elements such as ritual prescriptions, as opposed to the Christian emphasis on the "spirit" (in ethics, on the "intention"); by this criterion, pure Theravada Buddhism is not Pagan, while orthodox Judaism is; Vedantic Hinduism is not Pagan, while Tantric Hinduism is; the most austere forms of Protestantism are not Pagan, while Catholicism with its sacraments is.

Belief systems based on "Divine Revelation" spread first in the population centres, where a message can be communicated. In the European countryside, Pagan beliefs and practices (though not the most sophisticated ones, which had disappeared along with the Pagan elites, often the first to be converted) continued, sometimes in Christian disguise, until in the last two centuries they were rendered outdated, not by Christianity but by modernity.

To an extent, the same relation has existed between Buddhism and Hinduism: proselytizing Buddhism was an urban phenomenon, largely because it was dependent on patronage from merchants, princes and ordinary alms-givers, and on concentrations of people for the recruitment of new monks. Buddhism is a bit of a borderline case. It is a "natural religion" in that any individual could sit down under a tree and discover the process of meditation for himself. This way, Paganism as the "natural religion" or "cosmic spirituality" stretches from nature-oriented rituals to the heights of meditation, excluding only the exclusive revelations of prophetic monotheism.

On the other hand, the experience of Enlightenment is a much rarer one than the experience of the life cycle or the year cycle, and to that extent, Buddhism had to be preached and propagated. For this missionary trait, and for its basic non-interest in a pantheon (neither to worship it nor to reject it), Buddhism is often treated as separate from Paganism; Christian authors nowadays hesitate to call it Pagan.[11]

Paganism can thus be defined as the whole spectrum of "cosmic" religion (or "universism") as opposed to the "revealed" religions, whose message is not intrinsic to the world order. Prophetic monotheism desacralizes the cosmos by concentrating the sacred exclusively in an extra-cosmic deity: "Do not worship the sun and the moon, but worship Allah who created them."[12] Paganism sees the sacred in manifestations of cosmic order, cosmic power, cosmic beauty. If religion is defined as a matter of belief in a divine revelation, then one would have to say that Hindu culture exists, but not Hindu religion. Indeed, perceptive Indologists like Frits Staal have remarked that unlike Christianity and Islam, Hinduism is by no means a "religion" in the sense of "belief system".[13]

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[11] For a typical example, Karen Armstrong, formerly a Catholic nun and now an Islam enthusiast, calls herself a "free-lance monotheist with Buddhist influence" (speaking to Ludo Abicht on Flemish radio, 1996).

The point has also been made by many Hindu Revivalists and will be repeated several times in these pages, but for now we will quote a formulation by someone who was a Hindu revivalist in the most constructive sense all while remaining aloof from polemics: the late Ekkirala Krishnamacharya, physician, educationist and *Kulapati* (rector) of the Theosophy-related World Teacher Trust in Visakhapatnam. To a question about the "ancient religion of India", he replied:

"There was no religion in this land, nor was any religion necessary for the Indians. The ancient Indians had a code of law for man to follow. This was framed in accordance with various truths working in nature. The law of the existence of nature and its creation was observed in all its detail and the law for man to follow was copied in accordance with it. This was called Dharma. The term means that which bears and protects. It is that which bears and protects when we follow [it]. Man is honoured when he honours it. He receives protection when he protects it. It was made into a constitution called Bharata Dharma. It was the path of life commonly accepted throughout the land. Any attempt for religion is naturally limited and narrowed when compared with this."[14]

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[12] Quran 41:37.

[13] F. Staal: *Een Wijsgeer in het Oosten*, p.107-108. Likewise, in his book *Le Corps Taoïste*, Kristofer Schipper has made the same remark about Taoism.

[14] E. Krishnamacharya: *Our Heritage*, p.16.

So, Dharma is defined here as nothing but living in accordance with the laws of nature. We can accept this as a general definition even before discussing what precisely those laws could be.

Yet, the general term *Pagan* should not be taken to indicate a single "natural religion": within the range of Pagan traditions, there are important differences too, e.g. from vegetarianism to cannibalism. The difference lies in the crude or subtle perception of what precisely constitutes the laws of nature, the cosmic order (what the Vedas call *Rita*). At a very primitive level, one could say that "survival of the fittest" or "big fish eat small fish" is the law of nature to be followed: this yields Paganism in its caricature form.[15] At a more civilized level, say that of Greek philosophy, an appropriately more refined understanding of the laws of nature and of the concomitant human ethic is developed. The distinction which Hinduism claims is that through yoga, it has refined human sensitivity and made man receptive to subtler cosmic laws, such as the ultimate oneness of all sentient beings, hence the need for *dayâ* or *karuṇâ*, compassion.

2.4. Pagans and Hindus

As a concept, Paganism is a cornucopia with very divergent phenomena. When we survey the "neo-Pagan" scene in the modern West, we find a wide range of trends: from carnival-like impersonations of druids and witches to high-brow efforts at certified historical authenticity, and stretching across the political spectrum from neo-Nazis and ethnic revivalists to feminists, ecologists and hippie anarchists, all around a core mass of apolitical seeker types.[16] The great insights of Vedanta philosophy, or of "Pagan" Greek philosophy, are by no means a common heritage of all Pagan traditions.

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[15] In that sense, both Communism and Nazism could be considered as (secular, pseudo-scientific) forms of "Paganism", as is frequently done in Christian writings, e.g. the Vatican document on Christian responsibility for the Holocaust, March 1998. I find this usage confusing and hence undesirable, but the valid point is that both ideologies based themselves on (secularly understood) "laws of nature", in the case of Communism specified as "laws of history".

Yet, one could say that all of them have a common inspiration, and some Hindu thinkers have developed the position that Hinduism should reach out to other Pagan cultures and movements. Ram Swarup calls on the people who lost their Pagan heritage because of the take-over by Christianity or Islam to "make a pilgrimage through time" to rediscover their ancient Gods.[17] Unlike most Hindu nationalists whose horizon is limited by India's borders, he also shows some awareness about movements in the West actually exploring a revival of pre-Christian spirituality.[18] In the last couple of years, the VHP has tried to open lines of communication with organized neo-Paganism, but it is too early to report on any firm results.

It would seem that for real cooperation, the waters between Western neo-Paganism and Hinduism are still pretty deep. Many neo-Pagans reject elements of Christianity which happen to be held dear by serious Hindus, such as sobriety and self-restraint in matters of sexual morality, and are often quite unfamiliar with the Hindu ascetic and meditative traditions. Racist neo-Pagans would not be very interested in meeting dark immigrant Hindus anyway, and Left-leaning neo-Pagans are put off by newspaper reports about obscurantist practices and non-feminist conditions in Hindu society. But Hindu-Pagan rapprochement certainly has potential and may well flourish in the not too distant future.

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[16] See e.g. G. Harvey & C. Hardman: *Paganism Today*; Vivianne Crowley: *Principles of Paganism*; G. Harvey: *Speaking Earth, Listening People.*

[17] Ram Swarup: *The Word as Revelation: Names of Gods*, p.132.

[18] Ram Swarup corresponded with Prudence Jones, twice chairperson of the Pagan Federation, and with Gudrun Kristin Magnusdottir, Icelandic Pagan author of the book *Odsmal*, which ties the Germanic Asatru religion in with Transcendental Meditation and other Eastern lore. His article "Of Hindus, Pagans and the Return of the Gods" (*Hinduism Today*, Oct. 1991) was reprinted in the Californian anarcho-Pagan magazine *Green Egg*, Yule 1991 and again March 1998.

2.5. Polytheism and monotheism

Ram Swarup's book *The Word as Revelation: Names of Gods* is the closest you can get to an apology of polytheism, though it finds a place for monotheism as well. In some Western "neo-Pagan" writings, we find an explicit rejection of monotheism in favour of polytheism.[19] With that, neo-Pagan authors accept the Christian view that while Christianity is monotheistic, Paganism is polytheistic; they accept the terms of the debate in which Christianity claims superiority.

By contrast, Hindu philosophers who know their tradition don't fall for this "mono-poly" dichotomy: "In this deeper approach, the distinction is not between a True One God and the False Many Gods; it is between a true way of worship and a false way of worship. Wherever there is sincerity, truth and self-giving in worship, that worship goes to the true altar by whatever name we may designate it and in whatever way we may conceive it. But if it is not desireless, if it has ego, falsehood, conceit and deceit in it, then it is unavailing though it may be offered to the most True God, theologically speaking."[20]

It is not either "one" or "many", it is both: "like monotheism, polytheism too has its spiritual motive. If monotheism represents man's intuition for unity, polytheism represents his urge for differentiation. Spiritual life is one but it is vast and rich in expression. (...) only some form of polytheism can do justice to this variety and richness. (...) A pure monotheistic God, unrelieved by polytheistic elements, tends to become lifeless and abstract."[21] Ram Swarup argues that this is implicitly admitted by monotheist religions, which reintroduce diversity in their one God by giving one-hundred different names to Allah, by letting Him "emanate" into creation through the stages of the "Tree of Life" in the Jewish Kabbalah, or by perceiving a Trinity in Him, or by surrounding Him with a Virgin Mother and a heavenly host of angels and saints.

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[19] E.g. Alain de Benoist: *Comment peut-on être païen?* (French: "How to be a Pagan?"), part of the "mono-poly" polemic which animated the Paris parlours in ca. 1980, in which Bernard-Henry Lévy defended monotheism, albeit a "monotheism without God": *Le Testament de Dieu* (French: "God's testament").

[20] Ram Swarup: *Word as Revelation*, p.129.

Yet: "monotheism is not altogether without a spiritual motive. The Spirit is a unity. It also worships nothing less than the Supreme. Monotheism expresses, though inadequately, this intuition of man for the Supreme."[22] Some of the monotheist criticism of polytheism is also well taken: "Similarly, purely polytheistic Gods without any principle of unity amongst them lose their inner coherence. They fall apart and serve no spiritual purpose."[23]

But according to Ram Swarup, Hinduism has long outgrown the childhood diseases of polytheism with which lesser pantheons are afflicted: "The Vedic approach is probably the best. It gives unity without sacrificing diversity. In fact, it gives a deeper unity and a deeper diversity beyond the power of ordinary monotheism and polytheism. It is one with the yogic or the mystic approach."[24]

Likewise, Sri Aurobindo had already written: "Indian polytheism is not the popular polytheism of ancient Europe; for here the worshipper of many Gods still knows that all his divinities are forms, names, personalities and powers of the One; his gods proceed from the one Purusha, his goddesses are energies of the one divine Force." He adds a brief defence of "idolatry": "Indian image-worship is not the idolatry of a barbaric or undeveloped mind, for even the most ignorant know that the image is a symbol and support and can throw it away when its use is over."[25] Devotees of non-Hindu Gods would probably say the same thing for their own tradition. At any rate, in the event of a worldwide Pagan revival, Hinduism can claim a natural leadership role.

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[21] Ram Swarup: *Word as Revelation*, p.128.

[22] Ram Swarup: *Word as Revelation*, p.126.

[23] Ram Swarup: *Word as Revelation*, p.128.

[24] Ram Swarup: *Word as Revelation*, p.128.

2.6. Paganism in danger, Hinduism to the rescue

Along with other Hindu Revivalists, Shrikant Talageri puts Hinduism in a worldwide continuum of Paganism: "Hinduism is the name for the Indian territorial form of worldwide *Sanâtanism* (call it Paganism in English). The ideology of Hindutva should therefore be a universal ideology", and Hindu Revivalists should "spearhead a worldwide revival, rejuvenation and resurgence of spiritualism, and of all the world religions and cultures which existed all over the world before the advent of imperialist ideologies like Christianity, Islam, Fascism, Marxism etc."[26] Somewhat like Moscow for the world Communist movement, India should become the world centre of Pagan revival.

To put this Pagan solidarity into practice, the editors of the NRI paper *Young India* suggest creating two, three, many Ayodhyas: "Some 600 years ago there was a grand pagan temple at the foot of a sacred hill in Vilnius, the capital of Lithuania. It was demolished, the high priest banished (some say, murdered), and the place built up as a cathedral. We appeal to the Pope to return the spot to the Pagans of Lithuania who are the original and lawful historic owners of the sacred site. We further appeal to the Pope *not* to condone the desecration any longer. It cannot please his Lord, Jesus Christ in Heaven, who abhorred desecration and occupation of the others' holy sites."[27] This is perhaps not the kind of religious revival the world is waiting for; it is at least not the focus of Talageri's interest in world-wide Paganism.

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[25] Sri Aurobindo: *Foundations of Indian Culture*, p.135.

[26] S. Talageri in S.R. Goel: *Time for Stock-Taking*, p.227. *Sanâtanism*: from *Sanâtana Dharma*, the "eternal" religion, a self-designation of Hinduism.

[27] *Young India*, April 1998, back cover; emphasis in the original.

By "Paganism", Hindu Revivalists do not just mean the Indo-European (hence Veda-related) forms of pre-Christian religion: "The aborigines of Australia, the Red Indians of America, the pre-Islamic Pagans of Arabia, the Negroes of Africa are looking at Hindu society with expectation and hope. They are hopeful because it was the Hindu society in India alone which could survive the combined onslaught of Islam, Christianity and Marxism."[28]

A remarkable item in this list is "the pre-Islamic Pagans of Arabia". They have been out of existence since the 7th century, and unlike in Europe, no movement for Pagan revival is known to exist in Arabia. So, perhaps this is no more than a symbolic exercise, but Hindu revivalists want to render justice to the deceased Paganism of Arabia.

It is very common to mention the Pagans of Arabia, Prophet Mohammed's enemies, in purely pejorative terms. That this is done in Islamic writings is only to be expected; that Indian secularists follow suit, is hardly surprising. But it is also very common in Western scholarly publications, e.g., a famous Dutch Islamologist writes: "The Arab religion was a primitive polytheism, poor in real religiosity".[29] Moreover, he also relays as fact the Islamic claim that the Arab religion was a degeneration from what was originally a prophetic monotheism founded by Abraham in Mecca, an *Ur*-form of Islam: "Over time, among the Arabs, this original monotheism had degenerated into Paganism: the true knowledge had been lost."[30]

Against this near-monopoly of the Islamic version of what Arab Paganism stood for, a few Hindu Revivalists, most articulately Sita Ram Goel, have tried to reconstruct the Arab

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[28] Mayank Jain: "Let us fulfil the Sardar's mission", *Organiser*, 21-12-1997.

[29] J.H. Kramers: *De Koran* (Dutch), p.viii.

[30] J.H. Kramers: *De Koran*, p.x.

Pagans' own viewpoint. The subject is worthy of a detailed treatment, for it is decidedly one of the most original contributions of Hindu Revivalism, universally relevant for any understanding of the Prophet's career and of Islam; however, I will limit myself to a few general points here.

Far from being originally a form of Abrahamic monotheism, Arab Paganism was a cosmic religion, focusing largely on the starry sky, just like its fellow "Semitic" sister religion of Babylon, or like the Vedic religion.[31] The Arabs had a pantheon comparable to that of the ancient Greeks or Hindus, embodying metaphysical, cosmological and ethical notions. Just like India, "the whole of their homeland was honeycombed with temples and sanctuaries housing hundreds of divinities with as many Names and Forms."[32] After finishing a survey of what is actually known about Arab Paganism with a list of Arab deities, Goel concludes: "The deities listed in the foregoing few pages may sound too many to minds under the spell of monotheism. The fact, however, is that they are far too few and represent only what has been salvaged by modern scholarship from the extensive ruins caused by Islam."[33]

The presiding deity of the Ka'ba, the Arab national shrine, was a male moon deity, Hubal, who presents many similarities with Shiva; not least the fact that in the temples of both, the central *mûrti* (idol) is an unsculpted stone. While it would be exaggerated to say that the Ka'ba was a Shiva temple (a position taken by eccentric historian P.N. Oak), there is an undeniable typological kinship between Hinduism and Arab Paganism.

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[31] S.R. Goel: *Hindu Temples*, vol.2, p.266 and p.273-296, with reference to F. Hommel in *The First Encyclopaedia of Islam*, vol.1, p.377 ff., and to Shaikh Inayatullah: "Pre-Islamic Arabian Thought", in M.M. Sharif, ed.: *A History of Muslim Philosophy*, Lahore 1961.

[32] S.R. Goel: *Hindu Temples*, vol.2, p.294.

[33] S.R. Goel: *Hindu Temples*, vol.2, p.294.

If we count the polytheistic Greeks and Hindus as civilizations, Goel, who rejects the now-classical description of the Arab Pagan as "quarrelling rabble addicted to idol-worship", cautions us to think twice before condemning the Arab Pagans as savages in urgent need of Mohammed's civilizing mission: "It is nothing short of slanderous to say that pre-Islamic Arabs were barbarians devoid of religion and culture, unless we mean by religion and culture what the Muslim theologians mean."[34]

The Pagan Arabs themselves, at least, thought themselves very religious, though not in the sense of "believers". Goel quotes the reply of an Arab prince when the king of Persia had told him how inferior he considered the Arabs: "What nation could be put before the Arabs for strength or beauty or piety, courage, munificence, wisdom, pride or fidelity? (...) So liberal was he that he would slaughter the camel which was his sole wealth to give a meal to the stranger who came to him at night. No other people had poetry so elaborate or a language so expressive as theirs (...) So faithful were they to the ordinances of their religion that if a man met his father's murderer unarmed in one of the sacred months he would not harm him. A sign or look from them constituted an engagement which was absolutely inviolable".[35]

Again, we cannot go into more detail here, but it is important to note that this non-nationalist tendency within the Hindu Revivalist movement thinks in global terms. One of its goals, though as yet only conceived as distant and theoretical, is the restoration of Arabia, if not to its ancient religion, at least to some form of pluralistic non-prophetic religion. It is to be noted how far this ambitious tendency is removed from the defensive and gloomy psychology of "Hinduism under siege", though it is largely voiced by the same individuals.

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[34] S.R. Goel: *Hindu Temples*, vol.2, p.272.

[35] Quoted in D.S. Margoliouth: *Mohammed and the Rise of Islam*, p.2-3, and in Goel: *Hindu Temples*, vol.2, p.270.

3. Legal definition of "Hindu"

3.1. Hindu law

India's Constitution does not give a definition of the term *Hindu*, but it does define to whom the "Hindu Law" applies. It has to do this because in spite of its pretence to secularism, the Indian Constitution allows Muslims, Christians and Parsis a separate Personal Law. In a way, this separate treatment of different communities merely continues the communal autonomy of castes and sects accepted in pre-modern Hindu states, but it exposes the credibility deficit of Indian secularism. At any rate, the situation is that Personal Law is divided on the basis of religion, and that one of the legal subsystems is called *Hindu Law*.

Article 25 (2)(b) of the Constitution stipulates that "the reference to Hindus shall be construed as including a reference to persons professing the Sikh, Jain or Buddhist religion".[1] The Hindu Marriage Act of 1955 goes in greater detail to define this "legal Hindu", by stipulating in Section 2 that the Act applies:

"(a) to any person who is a Hindu by religion in any of its forms and developments, including a Virashaiva, a Lingayat or a follower of the Brahmo, Prarthana or Arya Samaj,

"(b) to any person who is a Buddhist, Jain or Sikh by religion, and

"(c) to any other person domiciled in the territories to which this Act extends who is not a Muslim, Christian, Parsi or Jew by religion".[2]

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[1] P.M. Bakshi: *The Constitution of India*, p.41.

[2] Discussed in detail in Paras Diwan: *Modern Hindu Law*, Ch.1. The Prarthana Samaj was a 19th-century reform movement, the Maharashtrian counterpart of the Brahmo Samaj.

This definition of the "legal Hindu", though explicitly not equating him with the "Hindu by religion", is exactly coterminous with the original Islamic use of the term *Hindu*: all Indian Pagans are legally Hindus. The Buddhists, Jains and Sikhs are explicitly included in the "Hindus by law" but separated from the "Hindus by religion": at this point, the law follows the usage established by Western scholars, contrary to the original usage.

Note that the changes in Hindu Law imposed by an Act of Parliament (on top of the very existence of separate Hindu and Muslim Law regimes) constitute a further measure of communal inequality. The secular government would not dare to touch the other religion-based law systems, as has repeatedly been shown in the past decades regarding items of Christian and Muslim Personal Law. An interference in Hindu Law by a national legislative body only makes sense in an avowedly Hindu state; in a sense, therefore, the Hindu Marriage Act constitutes an admission by Jawaharlal Nehru that ultimately India *is* a Hindu state.

3.2. Semi-Hindus

Separatist Sikhs have at times criticized the inclusion of the Sikhs in the "legal Hindu" category. When Law Minister Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar first introduced the Hindu Code Bill in 1951, Sikh spokesman Sardar Hukum Singh regarded the Bill as "a dubious attempt on the part of the Hindus to absorb the Sikhs". Dr. Ambedkar replied: "The application of the Hindu Code to Sikhs, Buddhists and Jains was a historical development and it would be too late, sociologically, to object to it. When the Buddha differed from the Vedic Brahmins, he did so only in matters of creed, but left the Hindu legal framework intact. He did not propound a separate law for his followers. The same was the case with Mahavir and the ten Sikh gurus. The Privy Council had as early as 1830 laid down that the Sikhs were governed by the Hindu law."[3]

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[3] D. Keer: *Ambedkar*, p.427, with reference to *Times of India*, 7-2-1951.

This at once explains why Ambedkar's neo-Buddhist followers have not objected to their inclusion in the "legal Hindu" category. On the contrary, this inclusion later served to justify their inclusion in reservation schemes and other benefits for Hindu ex-Untouchables: as Untouchability was a problem of Hindu society, it was reasonable that special benefits for this section of Hindu society only apply to ex-Untouchable members of the Hindu, or at least the "legal Hindu" category.

When the Ramakrishna Mission went to court to have itself declared a non-Hindu minority (in order to escape the legal anti-Hindu discriminations esp. in education), it claimed that its members could legally still be treated as Hindus in matters of marriage and inheritance, even while being recognized as non-Hindus in the religious sense.[4] In effect, the Ramakrishnaites wanted to have the same status as Sikhs and Buddhists: legal recognition as "legal Hindus and religious non-Hindus". They rightly understood that the law has created a category of semi-Hindus who have no separate traditions of personal law but have nevertheless a separate religious identity entitling them to the privileges accorded to the minorities.

The Indian laws make a distinction between what we may call the "Hindu in the broad sense", to whom Hindu Law applies, and who is coterminous with the Hindu of Persian-Islamic usage, viz. every Indian Pagan; and the "Hindu in the narrow sense", a category which may not include Buddhism and Sikhism. Though the law does not mention them, the tribal traditions are also taken to fall partly (except for a measure of accomplished sanskritization) outside this narrow category. Of course, the claims by different groups of belonging to this broad-Hindu but non-narrow-Hindu category should be considered separately and on their own merits, e.g. Buddhism's claim to a distinct identity does not imply an endorsement of Sikhism's claim to the same. The debate over whether certain communities come under the definition of Hinduism is largely a debate over whether it is the narrow or the broad definition that should be considered as the "true" definition.

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[4] About this claim of the Ramakrishna Mission, see below, Ch.6, as well as M.D. McLean: "Are Ramakrishnaites Hindus? Some implications of recent litigation on the question", in *South Asia*, vol.14, no.2 (1991); and see also Ram Swarup: *Ramakrishna Mission in Search of a New Identity*, as well as his exchange of arguments with Ram Narayan in *Indian Express* on 19/20-9-1990 and 15/16-11-1990.

3.3. The Scheduled Castes

A contentious point, esp. since the institution and expansion of caste-based reservation schemes, is the religious factor in defining the Scheduled Castes, the former Untouchables. The legal situation is as follows: "The Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order 1950 said in so many words that a non-Hindu could never be a Scheduled Caste (even if belonging to a particular caste included in the official list of Scheduled Castes). By an amendment introduced in 1956, it was provided that only a Hindu or a Sikh could be a Scheduled Caste. The Scheduled Caste law is, thus, clearly religion-based and its religious basis has generated abundant case law. The Supreme Court has held that a Scheduled Caste Hindu on ceasing to be a Hindu also ceases to be a Scheduled Caste and, should he ever reconvert to Hinduism, he will also regain forthwith the Scheduled Caste status."[5]

Meanwhile, Buddhists have also been explicitly included (and had already been implicitly treated) as belonging to the Hindu category in this regard, i.e. entitled to Scheduled Caste status if belonging to such a caste. Jains need no mention here, as they belong to the Vaishya upper castes; but the rare Scheduled Caste convert to Jainism would likewise remain entitled to benefits earmarked for the Scheduled Castes.

In contemporary anti-Hindu polemic, chiefly by Christian missionaries, and here by the Muslim chairman of the Minorities' Commission (an intrinsically anti-Hindu institution), it is frequently claimed that: "This law has been clearly designed with the object of preventing low caste Hindus, even if disgruntled with religion-based social inequalities, from converting to Christianity or Islam."[6]

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[5] Tahir Mahmood: "Are all tribals Hindus?", *Hindustan Times*, 28-1-1999.

If this seems plausible, and is hence repeated faithfully in most Western publications, it is nonetheless untrue. The Government of India Act (1935), enacted by the British who had other concerns, already excluded Christian converts from the Scheduled Castes category.[7] This was done after consultation with the missionaries, who were honest enough to acknowledge this as the obvious implication of their own boast that conversion brought freedom from caste disabilities. As long as Christians and Muslims propagate the notion that their own religion is egalitarian and caste-free, it is only logical that converts have to give up their Scheduled Caste status.

Today, all while propagating the necessary connection between Hinduism and caste disabilities, the Churches are clamouring for the recognition of their SC converts as "Dalit Christians". If they haven't had their way so far, it is mainly due to the opposition not from the Hindutva forces but from the neo-Buddhists and the legitimate Scheduled Castes themselves. At the time of writing, the legal position remains that only followers of Indic religions are classified by caste, with the concomitant legal benefits in case of low castes.

3.4. The Scheduled Tribes

The Scheduled Tribes as such are not mentioned in the context of defining the borders of the Hindu community, for "tribal" is only recognized in law as a sociological rather than a religious category. A Christian tribal is consequently still entitled to all the special privileges of Scheduled Tribe status. Or to put it in Tahir Mahmood's partisan language:

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[6] Tahir Mahmood: "Are all tribals Hindus?", *Hindustan Times*, 28-1-1999.

[7] For more detail on how Christian converts came to be excluded from the SC category, vide K. Elst: *Decolonizing the Hindu Mind*, p.555-558.

"The law on Scheduled Tribes is, on the contrary, wholly free from religious shackles. The 'No non-Hindu please' clause of the Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order 1950 has no parallel in the Constitution (Scheduled Tribe) Order 1950. Nor is there any judicial decision saying that all Scheduled Tribes are born Hindus. Any change of religion on the part of a member of a Scheduled Tribe does not legally alter his or her Scheduled Tribe status. The modern Hindu code of 1955-56 does not apply to Scheduled Tribes. (...) In respect of several tribal communities there have been judicial decisions specifically affirming that the four Hindu law enactments of 1955-56 do not extend to the Scheduled Tribes."[8]

This means, for example, that customary marriage systems including polygamy (abolished in the Hindu Marriage Act) are condoned in the case of tribals. There is undeniably a contradiction here, for the Hindu Marriage Act had defined the legal Hindu as including (apart from Hindus in the narrow sense, Buddhists, Jains and Sikhs) "any other person domiciled in the territories to which this Act extends who is not a Muslim, Christian, Parsi or Jew by religion". In spite of that definition, Indian law in general treats tribals as non-Hindus.

The 1991 census also separated tribal religion from Hinduism. It divided the population into eight different categories: Hindus, Muslim, Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains, "Other Religions and Persuasions", and "Religion non stated". In appendix, the "other religions and persuasions" are detailed, and about 60 tribal religions are specified.[9] The prevalent academic and mediatic dicourse takes this line further, e.g. by redefining the sanskritization of the tribals (the gradual adoption of elements of Sanskritic civilization, which has been a natural and ongoing process since many centuries) as "conversion to Hinduism", on the same footing as "conversion to Christianity"; and by describing Hindu social activists working in tribal areas as a kind of missionaries, outsiders propagating a religion that is quite foreign to the tribals. So, against the historical definition of "Hindu" which includes all Indian Pagans, and against the specific definition in the Hindu Marriage Act, which is coterminous with the historical definition, official India treats tribal religions as separate from Hinduism.

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[8] Tahir Mahmood: "Are all tribals Hindus?", *Hindustan Times*, 28-1-1999.

[9] Tahir Mahmood: "Are all tribals Hindus?", *Hindustan Times*, 28-1-1999.

4. Hindutva

4.1. Savarkar's definition

The ideological contours of the Hindu Mahasabha and the RSS-BJP are usually summed up in the term *Hindutva*, literally "Hindu-ness", meaning Hindu identity as a unifying identity transcending castewise, regional and sectarian differences within Hindu society. The term was coined by the Freedom Fighter and later HMS president V.D. Savarkar as the title of his book *Hindutva*, written in prison and clandestinely published in 1924. Inspired by the doctrines of the Italian liberal nationalist Giuseppe Mazzini, he tried to give a nationalist content to the concept of Hinduness. Incidentally, non-Hindutva nationalists including Jawaharlal Nehru equally recognized the influence which Mazzini had had on their ideological orientation during their student days.[1]

While there may be good reasons to reject the very attempt of capturing Hinduism in an essentialist definition, and while most attempts to capture it in a doctrinal definition are failures omitting large numbers of de facto Hindus, Savarkar devised his definition as very inclusive but still meaningful: "A Hindu means a person who regards this land of Bharatavarsha, from the Indus to the Seas, as his Fatherland as well as his Holyland, that is the cradle-land of his religion."[2]

This means that a non-Indian cannot be a Hindu, even if he considers India as his "Holyland"; while a born Indian cannot be a Hindu if he considers a non-Indian place (Mecca, Jerusalem, Rome) as his "Holyland". Since Jainism, Buddhism,

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[1] Nehru talking to Tibor Mende: *Conversations with Mr. Nehru*, p.15.

[2] V.D. Savarkar: *Hindutva*, p.116. In some editions this definition is also given as motto on the title page.

Veerashaivism, Sikhism, and all Indian tribal cults have their historical origins and sacred sites on Indian soil, all Indian Jains, Buddhists, Veerashaivas, Sikhs and so-called "animists" qualify as Hindus.

Following Savarkar, the RSS-BJP and other Hindu parties including Savarkar's own Hindu Mahasabha use the term "Hindu" in the broad sense: as including Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism, Veerashaivism, Arya Samaj, Ramakrishna Mission, Indian tribal "animists", and other sects and movements which elsewhere are sometimes described as separate religions in their own right. This merely follows the historical usage of the ancient Persians and of the medieval Muslim invaders, and the "legal Hindu" category of modern Indian legislation. The inclusive usage by Savarkar and the RSS-BJP has better legal and historical credentials than the insistently restrictive usage by India's secularists, who try to narrow the term's referent down to cow-worshipping non-tribal upper-caste *Sanâtanî* ("eternalist", here in the sense of "non-reformist", "non-Arya Samaji") Hindus, if at all they admit that Hinduism exists.

4.2. Can geography define religion?

A problem with Savarkar's definition is that certain communities may consider only their own area as fatherland and holyland, and do not identify with India as a whole. The horizon of many tribal communities is limited to a small area; they may say that they only consider that small area as their own, and that they feel like foreigners in other parts of India. This might even be claimed on behalf of the Sikhs, whose separatism is sometimes rationalized in secular terms as "Panjabi nationalism" (in spite of the pan-Indian pilgrimages of some of the Sikh Gurus). But Savarkar was satisfied that at any rate, their loyalty would be to an area within India, rather than to one outside of it.

That leaves us with the more fundamental problem that genuine Hindus may not bother to consider India as a kind of "holyland", holier than other pieces of Mother Earth. Hinduism has become international, and increasingly includes people who have never seen India or have only been there once or twice on a family visit, appalled at the dirt and lack of efficiency, and anxious to get back home to London or Vancouver. Further, many people with no Indian blood take up practices developed by Hindu culture without being very interested in the geographical cradle of their new-found "spiritual path". They may not be inclined to call themselves "Hindu" because of the term's geographical connotation, but they do commit themselves to the Hindu civilization, using terms like "Vedic" or "Dharma".[3]

The values of Sanatana Dharma are not tied up with this piece of land, and the Vedas or the Gita, though obviously situated in India, are not bothered with notions of "fatherland" and "holyland". As Dr. Pukh Raj Sharma, a teacher of Ayurveda and Bhakti-Yoga from Jodhpur once said: "The country India is not important. One day, India too will go."[4] So, we may question the wisdom of defining a religious tradition by an external characteristic such as its geographical location, even if the domain of this definition admirably coincides with the actual referent of the term *Hindu* in its common usage.

4.3. The Sangh Parivar's understanding of Hindutva

The RSS-BJP try to make Savarkar's term *Hindutva* even more inclusive than Savarkar intended. They claim that any Indian who "identifies with India" is thereby a Hindu. A Muslim who satisfies this condition (what Gandhians called a "nationalist Muslim") should call himself a "Mohammedi Hindu". As L.K. Advani explains: "those residing in the country are Hindus even if many of them believe in different religions.(...) those following Islam are 'Mohammedi Hindus'. Likewise, Christians living in the country are 'Christian Hindus', while Sikhs are termed 'Sikh Hindus'. The respective identities are not undermined by such a formulation."[5] In this sense, they would be just as much at home in a Hindu Rashtra as a Vaishnava or Shaiva Hindu.

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[3] E.g. Maharishi Mahesh Yogi's projects are all called "Vedic", partly at least because the term "Hindu" would repel many Westerners; ISKCON has a publication series *Veda Pockets* (Amsterdam); David Frawley's institute in Santa Fe is called *American Institute of Vedic Studies*, etc.

[4] Speaking in Mechelen, Belgium, 1991.

Thus, veteran journalist M.V. Kamath writes in the *Organiser*: "Hindutva, then, is what is common to all of us, Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Jains, Buddhists... whoever has Indian heritage. Hindutva is the engine that pulls the nation and takes us into the future. It is cultural nationalism that has the power to unite.(...) Hindutva is not Hinduism, it does not ask anyone to follow a particular creed or ritual. Indeed, it does not speak for Hinduism, it is not a religious doctrine."[6] Remark that an acknowledged spokesman of Sangh Parivar ideology includes Indian Christianity and Indian Islam in his understanding of Hindutva. This would reduce the meaning of *Hindutva* to the casual reasoning of a Sikh couple in Defence Colony interviewed during the 1989 elections: "*Ham Hindustân men rehte hain, ham Hindû hî to hue.* (We live in Hindustan, that makes us Hindu)."[7]

Both the nationalist definition of Hindu-ness developed by Savarkar and the clumsy notion of "Mohammedi Hindus" brandished by the RSS and BJP are elements of an attempt to delink the term Hinduism from its natural religious or cultural contents. In Savarkar's case, the definition restores a historical usage, but the RSS definition extends the meaning even further: the opposition between "Indian secular nationalism" and "Hindu communalism" is declared non-existent, essentially by replacing the latter's position with the former's:

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[5] "Advani wants Muslims to identify with 'Hindutva'", *Times of India*, 30-1-1995.

[6] M.V. Kamath: "The Essence of Hindutva", *Organiser*, 28-4-1996.

[7] "Voters in a dilemma", *Times of India*, 24-11-1989.

Kamath's conception of *Hindutva* is entirely coterminous with Jawaharlal Nehru's secular patriotism.

To support the non-doctrinal, non-religious, non-communal usage of the term *Hindu*, RSS joint secretary-general K.S. Sudarshan relates some anecdotes in which Arabs and Frenchmen refer to any Indian (including the Imam of Delhi's Jama Masjid when he visited Arabia) as a "Hindu".[8] So what? A linguist would say that in that case, the word *Hindu* is a "false friend": though sounding the same and having the same etymology, it has a different meaning in Arabic or French on the one and English or Hindi on the other hand. This is obviously no sound basis for denying the operative (and historical, and legal) meaning of *Hindu* as "any Indian *except* Muslims, Christians and Parsis".

A point of comparison for this overextended definition of Hindu identity is the now-common understanding of "Christian civilization" as encompassing more than just the believing Christians. Christian-Democrats after World War 2 have argued that "Christian values" have since long become a common heritage of Europe (and the Americas), shared by non-Christians as well.[9] And some non-Christians also accept this view.[10] If Christianity, which has strictly defined its own contours with precise beliefs, can be definitionally broadened to coincide with a "value system", the same could legitimately be done with the much less rigidly self-defined Hinduism.

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[8] In H.V. Seshadri et al.: *Why Hindu Rashtra?*, p.5. In French, the usage of *hindou* for "Indian" is obsolete. An anecdote not included though well-known is that HMS leader B.S. Moonje was asked in America whether "all Hindus are Muslims?"

[9] The founding "Christmas Programme" (1945) of the Belgian Christian-Democratic Party says: "The human values which form the basis of our Western civilization (...) were contributed by Christianity, yet today they are the common property of the faithful and the unbelievers"; quoted in L. Tindemans: *De toekomst van een idee* (Dutch: "The future of an idea", viz. of Christian-Democratic "personalism"), p.32.

[10] Thus, in 1994, the Dutch Liberal Party leader Frits Bolkestein, an agnostic and secularist, affirmed that the European polity could only be rooted in Christian values.

4.4. Equality of religions

Some Hindu activists insist that "all religions are equally true", a logically untenable sentimentalist position now widely shared in Western-educated Hindu circles as well as among some "progressive" Christians and "New Agers" in the West. As an explicit position, this is marginal in the Hindutva movement, though the Gandhian phrase "equal respect for all religions" (*sarva-dharma-samabhâva*), invoked in the BJP Constitution, comes close to the same meaning. At any rate, as an implicit guideline, the acceptance of all religions as equally good can be found all over the Hindutva literature.

Official publications of the BJP and even of the RSS studiously avoid criticism of Islam and Christianity as belief systems. Even the Rushdie affair, when the BJP put up a rather perfunctory defence of Salman Rushdie, did not trigger any debate on the basic doctrines of Islam in the pages of the Hindutva papers. The position of both RSS and BJP, and even of Hindutva hard-liners like Balraj Madhok, is that Islam and Christianity are alright in themselves, but that in India, they constitute a problem of disloyalty. As soon as these foreign-originated religions agree to shed their foreign loyalties and to "indianize" themselves, the problem vanishes.[11]

In theory, and at first sight, the doctrine of the equal validity of all religions could be intellectually defensible if we start from the Hindu doctrine of the *ishṭa devatâ*, the "chosen deity": every Hindu has a right to worship the deity or divine incarnation or guru whom he chooses, and this may include exotic characters like Allah or Jesus Christ. In practice, however, anyone can feel that something isn't right with this semantic manipulation: Muslims and Christians abhor and mock the idea of being defined as sects within "Hindutva", and apart from a handful of multiculturalist Christians who call themselves "both Hindu and Christian", this cooptation of

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[11] This is the central thesis of Balraj Madhok: *Indianisation*.

Muslims and Christians into the Hindu fold has no takers.[12] It is an elementary courtesy to check with the people concerned before you give them labels.

4.5. The impotence of semantic manipulation

If the attempt to redefine Indian Muslims as "Mohammedi Hindus" is received with little enthusiasm by non-Hindus, it is criticized even more sternly by Radical Hindus, who point out that the attempt to get Muslims and Christians under the umbrella of an extended Hindu identity constitutes a retreat from the historical Hindu position vis-à-vis the proselytizing religions: it confers an undeserved legitimacy upon the presence of the "predatory religions", Islam and Christianity, in India. The time-length of the presence of the colonial powers in their colonies (nearly five centuries in the case of some Portuguese colonies, and more than seven centuries in the case of the Arab possessions in Spain) did not *justify* their presence in the eyes of the native anti-colonial liberation movements. Likewise, the fact that Islam and Christianity have acquired a firm and enduring foothold in India does not, to Hindu Revivalists, make them acceptable as legitimate components of Indian culture. As Harsh Narain argues: "Muslim culture invaded Indian culture not to make friends with it but to wipe it out. (...) Hence Muslim culture cannot be said to be an integral part of Indian culture and must be regarded as an anticulture or counter-culture in our body-politic."[13]

Moreover, these semantic manipulations undermine the credibility of Hindu protests (regularly seen in the RSS weeklies and sometimes even in the BJP fortnightly *BJP Today*) against Christian and Muslim proselytization activities.

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[12] About Christian syncretism with Hinduism, see e.g. Bede Griffiths: *The Marriage of East and West*, and Catherine Cornille: *The Guru in Indian Catholicism*. A very critical Hindu comment on this trend is S.R. Goel: *Christian Ashrams: Sannyasins or Swindlers?*

[13] H. Narain: *Myth of Composite Culture*, p.29.

After all, if there is nothing wrong with these religions per se, then why bother if Hindus convert to them? Now that the Catholic Church uses "inculturation" as a mission strategy, why object to Hindus adopting this duly "indianized" version of Christianity?

These impotent semantic manipulations about "Mohammedi Hindus" invite contempt and ridicule. They have never convinced anyone, and it is typical of the RSS's refusal to learn from feedback that it still propagates these notions. Defining India's communal conflict in terms of secular nationalism, as a matter of "nationalist" vs. "anti-national" loyalties, is mostly the effect of Hindu escapism, of the refusal to confront Hinduism's challengers ideologically. Such exercises in self-deception are understandable as a symptom of Hindu society's lingering psychology of defeat, but after half a century of independence, that excuse has worn out its validity.

5. "Semitization" of Hinduism

5.1. The "Semitic religions"

At the height of the Ayodhya controversy, many secularists suddenly set themselves up as teachers of Hinduism, of "real Hinduism" as opposed to the "distorted" Hinduism of the Hindu Nationalists.[1] This was a crucial step forward for the Hindu cause, for it meant that Hinduism was replacing secularism as the norm. The secularists told the Hindu activists that Hinduism is alright, only, it is something altogether different from what you think it is.

Thus, to depict Rama as a virile warrior was a sin against Hinduism, an imitation of colonialist virility myths, a betrayal of the feminine passivity of genuine Hinduism. Or, to organize the Hindu religious personnel on a common platform (the Dharma Sansad, more or less "religious parliament") is an un-Hindu imitation of the Bishops' Synod in the Catholic Church. Or, to alert the Hindus against Muslim or Christian conversion campaigns is an abandonment of the cheerful Hindu indifference to sectarian name-tags, the only thing which really changes upon conversion. Indeed, anything that could play a role in upholding and preserving Hinduism was found to be un-Hindu, while anything that could make or keep Hinduism defenceless and moribund, was glorified as true Hinduism. Anything that smacked of vitality and the will to survive was dubbed "Semitic".[2]

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[1] See e.g. the debate on whether Swami Vivekananda, undoubtedly a Hindu, conformed to the modern definition of a "secularist", between A.B. Bardhan on the Communist side and Arun Shourie and Dina Nath Mishra on the Hindu side, in *Sunday*, 31-1, 7-2, 28-3, 2-5 and 8-8-1993.

In India, it is not uncommon to lump Judaism, Christianity and Islam, or what the latter calls "the peoples of the Book", together under the heading "Semitic religions". The choice of the term is unfortunate, not only because it is tainted (at least to Western ears) by its association with "anti-Semitism", but also because it is hopelessly inaccurate. It wrongly identifies a religious current with a language family, even while many Semitic-speaking peoples were Pagans (Babylonians, Assyrians, pre-Mosaic and even many post-Mosaic Israelites, pre-Mohammedan Arabs)[3] and the basic text of Christianity was written in non-Semitic Greek. Therefore, Sita Ram Goel and N.S. Rajaram advocate the abandonment of this term in favour of more analytic terms like "prophetic monotheism". In Goel's words: "I consider neither Christianity nor Islam Semitic religions. The Semites of the Middle East were Pagans; their tradition was pluralistic before the arrival of the Biblical God."[4]

Meanwhile, the term "Semitic" is still being used in a derogatory sense, mostly in a somewhat bizarre Marxist discourse alleging a tendency in the Hindu movement to borrow elements from the prophetic-monotheist religions. Hindutva is said to constitute a "semitization" of Hinduism.

5.2. "Semitic", or dogmatic and intolerant

It must be admitted at the outset that this usage of the term "Semitic" as meaning "that which Hinduism is not and should never become" is sometimes applied in good faith by people who wish Hinduism well. Thus, novelist U.R. Ananthamurthy (of the famous anti-Brahmin novel *Samskara*), when contrasting the Upanishadic tradition with contemporary Hindu militancy, offered the following observation which I could largely make my own: "The Hindu militancy that we see today is short-sighted because those behind it are aware of their history until 300 years ago. I do not begin with Shivaji. My ancestor is Yajnavalkya. The great tradition to which I belong was suspicious of all temples. I don't think there is room for radical mysticism in Hindu militancy. It's more political than spiritual. What I would describe briefly as—trying to semitise the Hindus."[5]

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[2] For more on the use of the concept "Semitic" in secularist discourse, vide K. Elst: *The Saffron Swastika*, Ch.8.5.4.

[3] In the USA, there are "neo-Pagan Jewish" associations harking back to the Israelite tradition in its "original wholeness", before Goddess Ashera, traditionally worshipped in sacred groves, was lopped off and censored out of the psalms by monotheistic and "patriarchal" scribes.

[4] Interview with S.R. Goel in *Antaios* (Brussels), summer 1996, p.78.

This is a benign piece of advice for the Hindutva movement to get serious about exploring the roots of the tradition to which it pays so much lip-service. What it says is that in comparison with the Upanishadic tradition, the Semitic religions lack interiority, and so does the Hindutva movement. In brandishing pro-Hindu slogans and pledging allegiance to Hindu civilization, the Hindutva activists resemble the proverbial donkey who carries a bag of gold on its back without being aware of the gold's value.

But unlike Ananthamurthy, most authors who use this concept of the "semitization of Hinduism" have no eye for the spiritual dimension which the Hindutva activists allegedly neglect. They bring up other concerns, which are also deemed un-Semitic by implication, e.g. social reform. Thus, Praful Bidwai sees a "forced attempt to forge a Semitic, monolithic, chosen people identity for Hindus" which "stands in sharp contrast to the enlightened effort at founding a modern, social rationale for religion as, say, in Vivekananda".[6]

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[5] U.R. Ananthamurthy, interviewed by Suchitra Chaudhary: "For export only", *Illustrated Weekly of India*, 5-12-1992.

[6] Praful Bidwai: "The Sena/VHP Offensive. Disintegrative Politics of Identity", *Times of India* 25-10-1991, quoted with approval in Antony Copley: "Indian Secularism Reconsidered: From Gandhi to Ayodhya", *Contemporary South Asia*, 1993, 2(1), p.45-65, n.4.

As if Vivekananda did not stand for an assertive—allegedly "Semitic"—Hinduism, all while paying attention to the need for social reform.

Most specifically, the allegation of "semitization" amounts to a claim that Hinduism is turned into a centralized, exclusivist and monopolistic religion. The Ayodhya movement is described as "an attempt to semitise the Hindu religion. Ram is to be the prophet and Ayodhya the Vatican City."[7]

But the Ayodhya movement has not changed the status which Ram had acquired long ago in existing Hindu tradition, nor has it ever defined him as a "prophet". It never tried to give him any "Semitic" kind of spiritual monopoly by discarding other ("rival") Hindu Gods. It never tried to give Ayodhya a new status nor to set up any institution similar in status to what the Papal State represents in Catholicism. Rather, the claim quoted appears to be the effect of first adopting the "semitization" rhetoric and then filling it in with the required "Semitic" features, without checking whether these correspond to the reality of the Ayodhya movement. Secularist criticism of Hindutva is amazingly careless on facts, apparently because a decades-long monopoly on public discourse has made the secularists smug and lazy.

5.3. Romila Thapar on semitization

The *locus classicus* of the theory of the "semitization of Hinduism by the Hindutva movement", implying a derogatory use of the term "Semitic", is JNU Professor Romila Thapar's claim that in the Hindu right wing's reasoning, "if capitalism is to succeed in India, then Hinduism would have to be moulded to a Semitic form (...) Characteristic of the Semitic religions are features such as a historically attested teacher or prophet, a sacred book, a geographically identifiable location for its beginnings, an ecclesiastical infrastructure and the conversion of large numbers of people to the religion—all characteristics which are largely irrelevant to the various manifestations of Hinduism until recent times. Thus instead of emphasizing the fact that the religious experience of Indian civilization and of religious sects which are bunched together under the label of 'Hindu' are distinctively different from that of the Semitic, attempts are being made to find parallels with the Semitic religions as if these parallels are necessary to the future of Hinduism. (...)

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[7] Mushirul Hasan, historian, quoted in Raj Chengappa: "Dangerous Dimensions", *India Today*, 15-2-1993.

"The teacher or prophet is replaced by the *avatâra* of Vishnu, Rama; the sacred book is the *Râmâyaṇa*; the geographical identity or the beginnings of the cult and the historicity of Rama are being sought in the insistence that the precise birthplace of Rama in Ayodhya was marked by a temple, which was destroyed by Babur and replaced by the Babri Masjid; an ecclesiastical infrastructure is implied by inducting into the movement the support of Mahants and the Shankaracharyas or what the Vishwa Hindu Parishad calls a *Dharma Sansad*; the support of large numbers of people, far surpassing the figures of earlier followers of *Râma-bhakti*, was organized through the worship of bricks destined for the building of a temple on the location of the mosque."[8]

Though the general impression that the Ayodhya militants display more muscle than understanding of the subtleties of Hinduism deserves consideration, much in this attack on Hindu activism as "false, semitized Hinduism" is unrelated to reality. To make "capitalism" the secret goal of Hindutva betrays ignorance of the strong socialist current within the Hindutva movement, esp. in the erstwhile Jana Sangh (1952-77) and in the RSS trade union, the Bharatiya

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[8] Romila Thapar: "A Historical Perspective on the Story of Rama", in S. Gopal, ed.: *Anatomy of a Confrontation*, p.141-163, spec. p.159-160. *Dharma Sansad* = "religious parliament", common platform of priests and renunciates convened by the VHP but shunned by the remaining citadels of Hindu orthodoxy because of its reformist orientation.

Mazdoor Sangh. At any rate, now that capitalism has proved victorious, there is still a Hindutva movement and a conflict between different ideologies, just as in the capitalist USA there are still political antagonisms between Christians and secularists. Let us just smile about this Marxist professor's naive reduction of every debate in the ideological-political superstructure to a conflict of interests in the economic infrastructure.

To say that Rama and the Ramayana have acquired the same positions in the Hindutva version of Hinduism as Jesus or Mohammed c.q. the Bible or the Quran is simply untrue. Since the discourse on "semitization" is meant to evoke the impression of fanaticism, it would also imply that Rama worshippers have practised typically Christian or Islamic forms of fanaticism, say, destroying images of "false gods" (like Shiva or Krishna?) or burning copies of rivalling "heretic" books (like the Vedas or the Gita?), if not the readers of these books as well. In reality, Hindus who worship Krishna or Shiva as their chosen deity have participated in the Ayodhya movement in huge numbers, without ever getting the impression that their own deity was being disparaged.

Moreover, Prof. Thapar's enumeration of the typical characteristics of the "Semitic religions" is not entirely accurate. A "historically attested teacher" is not necessarily proof of a "Semitic" religion. While not available for Hinduism as a whole, the type exists for certain sects and schools within Hinduism and other non-"Semitic" traditions (e.g. Confucianism), though these teachers (the Buddha, Guru Naṇak, Chaitanya) never claimed the same unique and apocalyptic status for themselves as Jesus and Mohammed did. The fact of having a historically situated founder is in itself no argument for or against the truth, the humaneness or even the Hinduness of a religious tradition.

Ms. Thapar is right, however, about having a "prophet" as founder as a defining characteristic of "Semitic religions". It would not be right to describe Gautama the Buddha, Guru

Nanak, Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, Swami Narayan and other founders of Hindu traditions as "prophets", i.e. exclusive spokesmen of the Heavenly Sovereign. By now, the term *prophet* cannot be delinked anymore from the more specific meaning which the Abrahamic religions have given to it: "one who communicates messages from God". In a less monopolistic sense, "communicating messages from a god" was a Shamanic practice common to many early cultures, but it only acquired its exclusive connotation when it was coupled with the doctrine of monotheism.

And this, then, is the crucial point about "Semitic religions" which Professor Thapar strangely overlooks. Monotheism is what the "Semitic religions" see as their own contribution to humanity's progress. Hinduism can accommodate monotheism: as Ram Swarup has argued, it sees no incompatibility between the unicity and the multiplicity of the Divine, nor between the immanence and transcendence of the Divine.[9] Hindutva authors never tire of quoting this Vedic verse which bridges the gap between the One and the Many: "The wise call the One Being by many names."[10] The defining characteristic of the "Semitic" religions is that they do not see unicity and multiplicity as two legitimately co-existing viewpoints but as hostile positions identifiable with good and evil, respectively.

It is not true that this characteristic of the "Semitic religions" has been adopted in any way by the Hindutva movement. While the 19th century Hindu reform sects Brahmo Samaj and Arya Samaj had been persuaded (or intimidated by the prevalent religious power equation) to reject polytheism and idol-worship as evil and as the cause of Hinduism's decline, today the "mono-poly" controversy is just not an issue to the broad spectrum of sects and schools which have joined the Dharma Sansad since 1985. It is not true at all that Rama has been projected in neo-monotheistic fashion as a sole "jealous God" or "final Prophet".

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[9] Vide Ram Swarup: *Word as Revelation*, and above, Ch.2.4.

[10] Rgveda 1:164:46.

Further, there is nothing wrong or "Semitic" about having "a sacred book, a geographically identifiable location for its beginnings, an ecclesiastical infrastructure and the conversion of large numbers of people to the religion"; nor is it true that these are "all characteristics which are largely irrelevant to the various manifestations of Hinduism until recent times". Hindus recited the Vedas even before the first "Semitic" scripture was compiled, and later the Gita, the Ramcharitmanas and other "sacred books". The Vedas and the Epics give quite a bit of information concerning their locations, and as for the Buddha, the Pali Canon tells us the exact location and circumstance of every single speech he gave.

As for conversion, various forms of initiation of outsiders into successively more inner circles of Hindu tradition have existed for millennia, from the Vedic Vratyastoma ritual down to the Shuddhi ritual of the Arya Samaj.[11] Buddhism is one offshoot of Hinduism which has practised the induction of newcomers on a large scale. The precise relation between Buddhism and Hinduism is a matter of dispute, as we shall see, but at any rate Buddhism is not "Semitic". Most "Pagan" religions have this more relaxed attitude towards the induction of outsiders: they keep the option open, esp. for people who marry into the community, but they don't propagate it. Some sects jealous of their pedigree even refuse to accept converts, e.g. the Parsis. However, to object to Hinduism accepting converts or "reconverts" in the present circumstances is to plead for the extinction of Hinduism, as indicated by the near-extinction of indeed the Parsis.

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[11] *Vrâtyastoma* was the ritual for Vedic initiation of the *Vrâtyas*, "those who live in groups" (though often explained as "those who are bound by a vow", such as the vow of silence, the vow of poverty, the vow of loyalty), roaming bands of warriors in the eastern Ganga plain, probably the origin of the ascetic Shramana sects.

Prof. Thapar is also off the mark when she alleges that Hindu Revivalists deny or disregard "the fact that the religious experience of Indian civilization [is] distinctively different from that of the Semitic" and that, on the contrary, they make "attempts to find parallels with the Semitic religions as if these parallels are necessary to the future of Hinduism". The whole of Hindu Revivalist literature is replete with emphatic assertions of the *contrast* between Hinduism and the prophetic-monotheistic religions, starting with the contrast between Hindu pluralism and prophetic-monotheist intolerance. This remained true even when some of the movement's leading lights inadvertently interiorized prejudices borrowed from Christianity or Islam, such as the insistence on monotheism.

So, the argument that Hindutva is a "semitized" form of Hinduism is a mixed affair, which in most respects fails to convince. It is a different matter whether the phenomena described as "semitization" are all that undesirable.

5.4. The need to "semitize" Hinduism

Against criticism of the attempt to set up an organized platform of Hindu religious leaders, the VHP's reply is: to the extent that this is an innovation, could it not be that Hindu society has the right to innovate its organizing principles when this is needed in the struggle for survival?[12] Does not the secularist rejection of any deviation from museum Hinduism betray a desire to impose *rigor mortis* on Hinduism? So far, there is no sign that the cooperation of religious personnel in the Dharma Sansad has caused any new limitations on the freedom of any sect to pursue its own spiritual path, quite unlike the stifling control exercised by certain "Semitic" authorities on their flock. All that has happened is that Hindu religious leaders are becoming more practical and adapting to the needs of modern society.

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[12] The need to *organize*, in Swami Shraddhananda's terminology *Hindu Sangathan*, is the basic philosophy and the very *raison d'Ítre* of the Sangh Parivar.

It is ironical that the sins of these "Semitic religions" are held against the Hindutva movement, which seeks to safeguard India from the further encroachment by those same religions. To be sure, real history presents such ironical cases of entities imitating their enemies all the better to defeat them; in this case, it has been called "strategic syncretism" or "strategic emulation".[13] But even if the Hindutva movement is such a case, it is still illogical to take it to task for imitating the prophetic-monotheistic religions without first putting these religions themselves in the dock.

A Hindu-friendly India-watcher of the Foreign Broadcast Information Service, a parastatal world-watch bureau in Washington DC, has remarked that this alleged semitization, which is but a pejorative synonym for self-organization, may simply be necessary for Hinduism's survival. He points out that in Africa, the traditional religions are fast being replaced by Christianity and Islam precisely because they have no organization which can prepare a strategy of self-defence.[14] African traditionalists are not denounced as "semitized fundamentalists" because in effect, they submit to the liquidation of their tradition by mass conversions.

It is hard to find fault with this observation (except to insist that the missionary religions are intrinsically superior and that consequently it is but a *good* thing if they replace the native traditions). Consider: why was the Roman Empire christianized, but not the Persian Empire? As a Flemish historian of early Christianity has shown, without using the term, the difference was precisely that the Roman state religion was not "semitized", while the Persian state religion was.[15] The Roman state religion was pluralistic and didn't have much of a policy, while the Mazdean state religion in Persia did organize the opposition against Christian proselytization, mobilizing both the state and the population, and developing a combative "Semitic" character in the process (the Mazdean oppression of Christianity led to the migration of some Syrian Christians to Kerala in the 4th century, where they survive till today). It is a different point whether the means used by the Persians were the right ones, but organization was certainly a minimum requirement.

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[13] C. Jaffrelot: *Hindu Nationalist Movement*, p.359, where the reference is to a policy of organizing collective (all-caste) services in temples in emulation of collective worship in mosques.

[14] Graydon Chiappetta, speaking to me at the Annual South Asia Conference in Madison, Wisconsin, October 1995.

And why did, in ca. AD 630, the Arabs lose their religion? In spite of being numerically in the majority, they lost against Mohammed in the battle of Badr, and likewise in the larger struggle for the land and soul of Arabia, for this reason: "The weak point of the Meccan army was that it consisted of different clans each with its own commander, while on the Muslim side there was only one commander, Mohammed. Moreover, the Meccans had not come to kill as many people as possible: that would only lead to endless vendettas. They simply wanted to show their strength and frighten the rebels. By contrast, Mohammed reacted in a fanatical way".[16]

The Arabs were defeated because they were not sufficiently organized, and not sufficiently determined. In the *Ridda* ("apostasy") war just after Mohammed's death, they repeated their mistake: after having defeated the Muslim army, they did not pursue it in its retreat. They demobilized while the Muslims regrouped and struck back, this time to liquidate Arab Paganism for good. The Arabs lost their religion because in the struggle against its mortal enemy, they were not "Semitic" enough.

Ram Swarup analyzes the political intention behind laudatory labels like "tolerant" and hate labels like "Semitic".

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[15] This is the main thesis of Dany Praet: *God der Goden*, in which he seeks to explain how the breakthrough of Christianity was possible.

[16] Lucas Catherine: *Islam voor ongelovigen* (Dutch: "Islam for Unbelievers"), p.29.

He too points to Africa as an instance of what to avoid: "The African continent has been under the attack of the two monolatrous religions, Christianity and Islam, for centuries. Under this attack, it has already lost much of its old culture. Recently, the attack has very much intensified and indigenous Africa is on the verge of losing its age-old religions. Some time ago, there was an article in the London *Economist* praising it for taking this attack with such pagan *tolerance*. But there was no word of protest against intolerance practised against its peoples and their religions."[17] This praise of religions which submit to being annihilated ("tolerant") and the concomitant opprobrium for religions which don't, indeed the condemnation of the very will to survive as "fanatical", is reminiscent of a French saying: "This animal is very mean: it defends itself when attacked."

5.5. The non-existence of Hinduism

So far, we have been assuming that the word "Hinduism" does have a referent in the real world. But judging from recent trends in Hinduism studies, this was naïve. Robert Frykenberg denies the Hindu identity as a recent fiction, and a pernicious one at that: "The concept of 'Hinduism' as denoting a single religious community has (...) done enormous, even incalculable damage to structures undergirding the peace, security and unity of the whole Indian political system."[18]

This habit of enclosing the word Hinduism in quotation marks is catching on. Thus, David Ludden rejects the notion that India "was ever populated predominantly by people whose identity was formed by their collective identification with a religion called 'Hinduism' or with a 'Hindu' religious persona".[19] In this view, the Hindu nation is at best an "identity project", and for that matter one bound to fail, given the internal contradictions of the "Hindu" conglomerate of communities.

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[17] Ram Swarup: *Hindu View*, p.52; emphasis in the original.

[18] Robert Eric Frykenburg: "The Emergence of Modern 'Hinduism' as a Concept and as an Institution", in G. Sontheimer and H. Kulke, eds.: *Hinduism Reconsidered*, p.29.

[19] D. Ludden: *Making India Hindu*, p.6.

But does Prof. Ludden's argument refute the position of the Hindu nationalists? After all, they will readily agree with his observation that "'Hindu' thus did not begin its career as a religious term, but rather as a term used by outsiders and state officials to designate people who lived east of the Indus".[20] Hindus indeed did not call themselves Hindu until outsiders did so, a historical and terminological anecdote which they do not find threatening to the underlying reality of an ancient Hindu identity.[21]

This does not exclude a collective identity: people within a collective refer to one another's lower-level identities (i.e. Brahmins, Banias, Jats, Chamars; or Kashmiris, Gujaratis, Tamils; or Vaishnavas, Kabirpanthis etc.), but in a meeting with outsiders, everyone realizes that something distinguishes the outsiders from all of them collectively. This scenario is not very problematic. Everybody knows that within the Brown family, Johnny and Mary never call each other Brown, and if it wasn't for the occasional meeting with outsiders (schoolteachers reading out the list of their new pupils, etc.), they would grow up without ever knowing that they were the Browns; but outsiders call both of them Brown, because from the outside it is obvious that for all their separate identities, they are members of a single family.

Consider Arun Shourie's rewording of the dominant paradigm: "Caste is real. The working class is real. Being a Naga is real. But 'India is just a geographical expression!' Similarly, being a Muslim, of course, is real (...) But Hinduism?

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[20] D. Ludden: *Making India Hindu*, p.7. Ludden is, however, mistaken in attributing the fixation of the current meaning of *Hindu* to the British ("government use in census statistics and elections", p.7) rather than the earliest Muslim invaders, a mistake of about 1,000 years.

[21] Explained in S.R. Goel: *Hindu and Hinduism, Manipulation of Meanings.*

Why, there is no such thing: it is just an aggregation, a pile of assorted beliefs and practices. In a word, the parts alone are real. The whole is just a construct."[22] Numerous Indians including the Muslims for thirteen centuries have had no difficulty recognizing some basic cultural traits collectively designated as *Hindu*. If today's intellectuals cannot recognize these, the problem may well be in the eye of the beholder. Shourie, for one, does not believe in their good faith: "The beginning of reconstruction, therefore, the *sine qua non* for it, is to overturn the intellectual fashions set by these intellectuals, and defeat their verbal terrorism."[23]

So, in this view, the reality of narrower identities, like caste, need not exclude the reality of larger identities, such as Hindu-ness, or for that matter, Indian-ness, a notion equally challenged as unreal and unhistorical.[24] Identities are partly a matter of choice, and the choice of secularists and Indologists to play down the larger identity and fortify the smaller identity can legitimately be read as a political act in an ongoing struggle, parallel and partly equivalent with the struggle between various separatisms and Indian unity. That, at least, is a central Hindu Revivalist suspicion.[25] Against it, Hindus, for once on the same wavelength with "nation-builder" Jawaharlal Nehru, want to strengthen the factors which unite these many castes and language groups, want to maximize the more encompassing levels of identity.

5.6. Circular proof for Hinduism's non-existence

The fashionable view of Hinduism is summed up in Arthur Bonner's claim: "A Hindu is a Hindu not because he accepts doctrines or philosophies but because he is a member of a caste"[26], and: "Without caste there is no Hindu".[27] This caste identity is so strong, that it excludes any common identity between members of different castes: "Social entities functioned on a rigid caste basis. North Indians, for instance, saw one another as Brahmins, Rajputs, Baniyas, Khatris, Jats, Ahirs, Chamars, or Muslims—distinctive castes, not fellow citizens."[28]

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[22] A. Shourie: "Parts talk and anti-ourselves talk", *Observer of Business and Politics*, 15-11-1996.

[23] A. Shourie: "Parts talk and anti-ourselves talk", *Observer of Business and Politics*, 15-11-1996.

[24] E.g.: C. Aloysius: *Nationalism without a Nation in India.*

[25] E.g. A. Shourie: *A Secular Agenda. For Saving Our Country, for Welding It*, esp. Ch.1: "'But we aren't even one nation'".

I let the claim of caste "rigidity" pass; a budding line in Hindu Revivalist history-rewriting, rather well in touch with modern Western scholarship, is to question this alleged age-old rigidity of caste and emphasize the relative fluidity of the system before British policies and the census classifications rigidified it. Even Jawaharlal Nehru observed: "But I think that the conception of Hindu society as a very conservative society (...) is not quite correct. In the past, changes took place not by legislation but by custom; by the people themselves changing."[29]

The impression of the all-pervasiveness of caste is a colonial construct. Firstly, the East India Company had entrusted Brahmins with the task of informing its own officials who were compiling a native-based law code; these Brahmins imposed their own view, which was the scripturalist reference to the Shastras, but which was not shared by all layers of society nor universally operative in social practice.[30] Secondly, there was the, perhaps unintended, effect of policies of the modern state.

As J.C. Heesterman writes, "the modern state—in contradistinction to the ancien regime—is hived off from society and pretends to govern it by remote control as it were. To that end, it first of all needs an all-inclusive and immutable grid of rigidly bounded and inflexible categories (...) This need for an immutable grid of categories was filled with deplorable obviousness by caste, seemingly custom-made for the purpose, esp. in its Brahmanic form of varna separation. Conversely, the modern state and its census grid could not but project the image of an unchangeably fixed order of society. One may wonder whether and how far the notion of a never-changing, utterly tradition-bound and stagnating India has been formed by the modern state's view of society."[31]

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[26] A. Bonner: *Democracy in India*, p.46, quoting J. Hinnells and E. Sharpe: *Hinduism*, p.128.

[27] A. Bonner: *Democracy in India*, p.46, quoting Max Weber, no reference given, but actually from Weber: *The Religion of India*, p.29.

[28] A. Bonner: *Democracy in India*, p.46.

[29] Nehru talking to Tibor Mende: *Conversations with Mr. Nehru*, p.107.

[30] "In fact, the whole of the law was hardly a codified law", according to J. Nehru talking to Tibor Mende: *Conversations with Mr. Nehru*, p.107.

The point we should look into now, is whether, as Bonner claims, the people concerned were *only* members of distinctive castes, and not citizens of a common polity. It seems to me that this claim is factually incorrect. Leave aside the higher levels, even the village community was based on an ongoing process of compromise between the castes represented in the village through the village panchayat, which decided by consensus.[32] It is simply obvious that the communities interacted, not at random but as parts of a larger polity, both at the village and at the state level; yes, there were structures integrating the different castes into a single polity. One of the meanings of *Dharma* is precisely the harmonious integration of such diverse units into a functioning whole, and that is precisely the difference between present-day caste struggle and the ancient caste system. One could argue that this meant that people were kept in their place with religious sop stories, "opium of the people" (like in most pre-modern societies), but the fact itself stands out: the functional gap between castes was bridged by a number of cultural factors, integrating them into a society of which the Muslim invaders immediately saw the distinctiveness and coherence, and which they labelled as "Hindu". This is what Ram Swarup refers to when commenting on those who reduce Hinduism to caste, lopping off its cultural and religious dimensions: "The new self-styled social justice intellectuals and parties do not want an India without castes, they want castes without dharma."[33]

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[31] J.C. Heesterman: *The Inner Conflict of Tradition*, p.202.

[32] *Panchâyat* = "council of five", village council.

Moreover, the inclusion of the Muslims in the list on an equal footing with the Hindu castes is an unjustifiable sleight-of-hand, for there is a decisive difference between Muslims on the one and all the others on the other hand: from an Islamic viewpoint, the former go to heaven and the latter to hell, the former can marry Muslim women and the latter cannot, and other legally and theologically consequential contrasts. From a Hindu viewpoint too, there is a decisive difference: though an orthodox Brahmin will keep both the Jat and the Muslim far from his daughter and from his dinner table, he will serve as ritual officiant for the Jat but not for the Muslim, and he knows that the Jat worships the same Gods as he does, unlike the Muslim.

For another application of the dominant paradigm, Kancha Ilaiah tries to prove the non-existence of a common "Hindu" identity by recounting that in his own Andhra village, the Backward *Karuma* (wool-weaver) community felt closer to Muslims and Christians ("we all eat meat") than to Brahmins and Banias, who treated the three other communities as equally impure.[34] Ironically, this argument is typically Hindu: it does not consider belief but observation or non-observation of purity rules as the decisive criterion. This only makes sense as long as religion, esp. the viewpoint of those Christians and Muslims, is kept out of the picture; once you consider the criterion of religious belief too, the cleavage between Christians or Muslims on the one hand and Brahmins and Karumas on the other proves more fundamental. Christians and Muslims are trained to be sharply aware of religious identities, and to them, both Shudras and Brahmins are unbelievers. Possibly some of Ilaiah's Christian or Muslim neighbours were liberals uninterested in matters of afterlife salvation, only Christian or Muslim in name, but then their transcending these communal boundaries took place precisely to the extent that they, too, kept religious doctrine out of the picture.

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[33] Ram Swarup: "Logic behind Perversion of Caste", *Indian Express*, 13-9-1996.

[34] Kancha Ilaiah: *Why I Am Not a Hindu*, p.xi. With its promising title, and in spite of its rich panorama of the specificities of Backward Caste culture, the book disappoints because unlike its title counterparts (Bertrand Russell: *Why I Am Not a Christian*, and Ibn Warraq: *Why I Am Not a Muslim*), it fails to address the central doctrinal aspects of the repudiated religion, on the admittedly voguish, nearly paradigmatic assumption that Hinduism can be reduced to its social structure (though to his credit, he is less extreme in this approach than the Western scholars cited in this section).

Ilaiah describes the distinctive religious practices of the Backward Castes, which do differ on some points with those of the Brahmins. In that context, he mentions the folk Goddess Pochamma, popular among the Backwards but accessible to all, so that even "a Brahmin can speak to her in Sanskrit".[35] The point is: a Muslim or a Christian who takes his religion seriously, will not speak to her at all, unlike the frequent Backward and the occasional Brahmin worshippers. That is how, in spite of the social distance, religion does unite all Hindu castes as distinct from Christians and Muslims.

Bonner's juxtaposition of Muslims with Brahmins and Karumas, suggesting that the difference between the Hindu castes is as deep as that between any of them and the Muslims, is similarly based on the denial of the religious dimension. It is more or less the logical and necessary outcome of his assumption that Hinduism is caste, wholly caste and nothing but caste. That assumption is simply wrong.

If it were right, it would mean that all tribals, all Christians, most Muslims, as well as the Parsis and the Jews of India, are all Hindus, for practically all of them traditionally observe endogamy rules. That is admittedly one version of *Hindutva*, affirmed many times by BJP stalwarts: that all Indians are Hindus because they share a common culture (of which, fortunately or unfortunately, caste practices are a part), even if they believe in Jesus or Mohammed. But such an extension rather than a denial of Hindu identity is obviously not what Bonner meant. On the other hand, many progressive and overseas Hindus who ignore commensality rules altogether and increasingly dispense with endogamy as well would fall outside the Hindu category, no matter how much they perform Durga-puja or Surya-namaskar or Agni-hotra.[36] Such a definition of Hinduism is entirely counterintuitive: what else would you call a Ganesha worshipper, regardless of caste observance, if not Hindu?

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[35] K. Ilaiah: *Why I Am Not a Hindu*, p.92.

Hindus are aware that Hindu civilization is not monolithic and subjected to uniform normative prescriptions of faith and behaviour emanating from a single scriptural or ecclesiastical authority. Most Hindutva ideologues keep on eulogizing this pluralism and diversity: "Since India never had a religion in the sense in which Islam and Christianity are religions, it never had religious unity of the type that Islamic and Christian countries [have], in which the people are forced to conform to the religion of the rulers. Such a creed is alien to the Hindu ethics and culture rooted in the Vedic gospel: *Ekam sad viprah bahudha vadanti*, 'God is one but the wise call Him by many names.'"[37] The very phenomenon (decentralization, pluralism) which Frykenberg, Ludden, Bonner and their school propose as a devastating refutation of Hindu identity and as a trump card against the Hindu movement, has since long been appropriated by the Hindu movement and brandished as one of the great merits of Hinduism.

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[36] *Durgâ-pûjâ*: devotional ritual for Durga, annual autumn festival; *Sûrya-namaskâra*: "salute to the sun", term of both a ritual and a yogic exercise; *Agni-hotra*: Vedic fire ceremony.

[37] Balraj Madhok: *Rationale of Hindu State*, p.32. Madhok, under Arya Samaj influence, translates "ekam sat" as "one God"; but it means "one being", "one truth".

But the said Indologists, along with the Indian Marxists, do not accept this more relaxed and pluralistic view of Hindu identity: to them, that is no collective identity at all. When Hindus try to set up a minimum of pan-Hindu organization, they are accused of being unfaithful to the true Hindu tradition of decentralization, and of "semitizing" Hinduism. At that point, their critics suddenly assume the existence of Hinduism and even claim to know its essence well enough to assure us that it is the opposite of "Semitic". Yet, precisely because Hinduism does not have a monolithic, "Semitic" view of its own collective identity, the same critics refuse to acknowledge the very existence of such a thing as Hinduism.[38]

Once more, Hindus are damned if they do, damned if they don't, typifying their lingering condition of colonial underlings. And it is only because of their inferior position that this game can be played with them: first telling them that their religion doesn't exist because it has no "Semitic" type of core structure; then taunting them for being untrue to their non-existent religion by devising an allegedly "Semitic" structure.

5.7. Conclusion

There is no simple solution for the complex question, "Who is a Hindu?" Definitions using tests of beliefs or caste practices fail to yield a semantic domain which approximately coincides with the collection of people actually described as Hindus at any time of the term's usage. Yet, attempts to deny that there exist a meaningful usage of the collective term

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[38] This manipulation of meanings, with non-Hindus appropriating to themselves the authority of deciding what *Hindu* means, in disregard of its established meaning and even of elementary logic (where the first rule is *"a = a"*, a term retains the same meaning all through), is just a matter of *who is in power*. This is where *Alice in Wonderland* was told by Humpty Dumpty that the meaning of words is a matter of who is boss.

Hindu must be rejected, even if there is plenty of diversity within its normal semantic domain.

Moreover, we have discovered one definition which is both implied in the oldest usage of the term in India and accepted by the Constitution and Laws of the Indian Republic: is Hindu, every Indian who is not a Jew, a Muslim, a Christian or a Zoroastrian (*Indian* being a geographical term referring to the whole subcontinent). Given these credentials, this definition certainly deserves precedence over all newly-proposed alternatives. Hindus themselves have appropriated it as a key to a universal dimension of their confrontation with Christianity and Islam, viz. by catching it in the phrase "Indian Paganism".

This definition is more or less equivalent with V.D. Savarkar's definition of *Hindutva*, which may be reformulated as follows: is Hindu, every Indian who considers India his Holyland. However, the Sangh Parivar has tried to broaden the scope of this term in a secular-nationalist sense, so as to include "nationalist" Christians and Muslims. This broader usage is not catching on, and for good reason: the communities affected reject it, and the term *Hindu* in its established usage is highly functional, whereas its proposed shift in meaning to some kind of synonymy with the geographical term *Indian* serves no purpose except to blur issues.

6. Are Hindu reformists Hindus?

The historical and legal definition of "Hindus" as "Indian Pagans" is clear-cut, easy to use, and it has the law and historical primogeniture on its side. This inclusive definition of Hinduism is eagerly used by Hindu nationalist organizations (usually in its Savarkarite "Hindutva" adaptation), but there is still a serious problem with it: a number of the people included object to the label "Hindu". Indeed, this label is often in conflict with the self-descriptions of certain communities, particularly among the Buddhists, Jains, Sikhs and some of the Scheduled Tribes.

An obvious choice for a definition could have been: "Is Hindu, he who calls himself a Hindu". But history decided otherwise: no Hindu called himself a Hindu when the term was first applied by the Muslim invaders. The converse definition: "Is non-Hindu, he who calls himself a non-Hindu", was also not favoured by history: the British census policies overruled the self-description of many Sikhs and tribals as "Hindus" and forced them into newly created non-Hindu categories of "Sikh" and "animist" against their explicit wishes.

Today, eventhough the term *Hindu* has gained wide acceptance as a self-description, it is still an ill-fitting garment. Within the Sikh and Jain communities, there is discussion about the question: "Are we Hindus?" Self-definition will be only one factor considered in the following discussion of the Hindu or non-Hindu identity of some borderline cases, along with the several sets of criteria which we have come across in the preceding chapters.

6.1. The Ramakrishna Mission's conversion

The label "Hindu" is very unpopular. Both in its traditional and in its activist incarnation, Hinduism has been getting a bad press: the former is attacked as the ultimate in social injustice (caste, self-immolation of widows etc.), the latter as fanatical and dangerous to the minorities. Moreover, being a Hindu brings material disadvantages: Hindu organizations active in the field of education may find their institutions taken over by State Governments, a take-over against which minority institutions are protected by Article 30 of the Constitution, esp. Art. 30.(1): "All minorities, whether based on religion or language, shall have the right to establish and administer educational institutions of their choice."

One such Hindu organization threatened in its educational project is the Ramakrishna Mission, founded by Swami Vivekananda. To protect itself against such take-overs by the West Bengal Government, the Ramakrishna Mission itself approached the Calcutta High Court in 1980 to have "Ramakrishnaism" declared a non-Hindu religion which is, moreover, a minority religion.[1] The opposite position, that the Ramakrishna Mission has always been and still is a representative and servant of Hinduism was upheld not only by the materially interested West Bengal Government, but also by lay members of the Ramakrishna Mission itself (who had joined the Mission for no other reason than that they wanted to work for Hinduism), and especially by the teachers at Vivekananda Centenary College, Rahara, District of 24 Parganas. The latter had started a trade-unionist agitation, supported by the Communist Party (Marxist), against the college management, and their demands would have to be met unless the college was a minority institution, which has far greater freedom in selection and recruitment (including lay-off) of personnel.

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[1] According to the RK Mission register (quoted by Ram Swarup: *Ramakrishna Mission in Search of a New Identity*, p.3), there were 1400 Ramakrishnaist monks and 106,072 lay followers in 1980; on an Indian scale, this is definitely a minority.

RK Mission sympathizers like Abhas Chatterjee and Ram Swarup had no problem in proving that Swami Vivekananda, representative of Hinduism at the World Parliament of Religions (Chicago 1893), had established the Mission as an instrument for rejuvenating and propagating Hinduism.[2] Ram Swarup replies to those who take Vivekananda's optimistic belief in a "universal religion" for a goodbye to Hinduism: "Vivekananda believed in a universal religion, but to him it was not an artificial product made up of quotations culled from various scriptures, the current idea of universal religion. To him, it already existed in the form of *Vedânta*, which alone 'can be the universal religion in the world, because it teaches principles and not persons'."[3] Whatever else Vivekananda may have been, he was certainly a Hindu.

6.2. Ramakrishna's experiments

The central argument of the RK Mission for its non-Hindu character was that, unlike Hinduism, it upheld the "equal truth of all religions" and the "equal respect for all religions". The latter slogan was popularized by Mahatma Gandhi as *sarva-dharma-samabhâva*, a formula officially approved and upheld in the BJP's constitution.[4] In 1983, RK Mission spokesman Swami Lokeshwarananda said: "Is Ramakrishna only a Hindu? Why did he then worship in the Christian and Islamic fashions? He is, in fact, an avatar of all religions, a synthesis of all faiths."[5]

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[2] Ram Swarup: *Ramakrishna Mission in Search of a New Identity* (1986) and his exchange of arguments with RK Mission representative Ram Narayan in *Indian Express*, 19/20-9-1990 and 15/16-11-1990.

[3] Ram Swarup: "His vision and mission. Vivekananda is being wrongly portrayed as a champion of a synthetic religion", *Observer of Business and Politics*, 28-8-1993. No source is given for what seems to be a quotation; at any rate, it sums up, faithfully if not literally, the message of the first part of Vivekananda's famous address: "Is Vedanta the Future Religion?" (San Francisco 1900), reproduced in Vivekananda's *Complete Works*, vol.8, see esp. p.124-125.

[4] BJP: *Constitution and Rules*, art.IV, p.4.

The basis of the Swami's claim is a story that Swami Vivekananda's guru Paramahansa Ramakrishna (1836-86) once, in 1866, dressed up as a Muslim and then continued his spiritual exercises until he had a vision; and likewise as a Christian in 1874. If at all true, these little experiments shouldn't be given too much weight, considering Ramakrishna's general habit of dressing up a little for devotional purposes, e.g. as a woman, to experience Krishna the lover through the eyes of His beloved Radha (not uncommon among Krishna devotees in Vrindavan); or hanging in trees to impersonate Hanuman, Rama's monkey helper.

But is the story true? Ram Swarup finds that it is absent in the earliest recordings of Ramakrishna's own talks. It first appears in a biography written 25 years after Ramakrishna's death by Swami Saradananda (*Sri Ramakrishna, the Great Master*), who had known the Master only in the last two years of his life. Even then, mention (on just one page in a 1050-page volume) is only made of a vision of a luminous figure. The next biographer, Swami Nikhilananda, ventures to guess that the figure was "perhaps Mohammed".[6] In subsequent versions, this guess became a dead certainty, and that "vision of Mohammed" became the basis of the doctrine that he spent some time as a Muslim, and likewise as a Christian, and that he "proved the truth" of those religions by attaining the highest yogic state on those occasions.[7]

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[5] Quoted in S.P. Ray: *Turning of the Wheel*, p.58.

[6] Details of the step-by-step genesis of this story are given in Ram Swarup: *Ramakrishna Mission in Search of a New Identity*, p.8-9.

[7] As the alleged vision of Jesus was slightly more glorious than that of Mohammed, Ram Swarup sarcastically suggests (*Ramakrishna Mission*, p.9) new horizons to the "equal truth of all religions" school: "This difference could provide much scope for future disputants. One school may hold that while all prophets are equal, some are more equal than others."

It is hard not to sympathize with Ram Swarup's skepticism. In today's cult scene there are enough wild claims abroad, and it is only right to hold their propagators guilty (of gullibility if not of deception) until proven innocent. In particular, a group claiming "experimental verification" of a religious truth claim as the unique achievement of its founder should not be let off without producing that verification here and now; shady claims about an insufficiently attested event more than a century ago will not do. It is entirely typical of the psychology behind this myth-making that a researcher can testify: "Neither Svami Vivekananda, nor any other monk known to the author, ever carried out his own experiments. They all accepted the truth of all religions on the basis of their master's work."[8] This is the familiar pattern of the followers of a master who are too mediocre to try for themselves that which they consider as the basis of the master's greatness, but who do not hesitate to make claims of superiority for their sect on that same (untested, hearsay) basis.

6.3. Was Ramakrishna a Muslim ?

For some more polemical comment, let us look into one typical pamphlet by a Hindu upholding the Hindu character of the Ramakrishna Mission: *The Lullaby of 'Sarva-Dharma-Samabhâva'* ("equal respect for all religions") by Siva Prasad Ray.[9] The doctrine of "equal respect for all religions" (in fact, even a more radical version, "equal truth of all religions", is one of the items claimed by the RK Mission as setting it apart from Hinduism.

This doctrine is propagated by many English-speaking gurus, and one of its practical effects is that Hindu girls in westernized circles (including those in overseas Hindu communities) who fall in love with Muslims, feel justified in disobeying their unpleasantly surprised parents, and often taunt them: "What is the matter if I marry a Muslim and your grandchildren become Muslims? Don't these Babas to whom you give your devotion and money always say that all religions teach the same thing, that Islam is as good as Hinduism, that Allah and Shiva are one and the same?"[10]

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[8] George M. Williams: "The Ramakrishna Mission: A Study in Religious Change", in Robert D. Baird: *Religion in Modern India*, p.62.

[9] Included as Ch.7 in S.P. Ray: *Turning of the Wheel.*

When such marriages last (many end in early divorce), a Hindu or Western environment often leads to the ineffectiveness of the formal conversion of the Hindu partner to Islam, so that the children are not raised as Muslims. Yet, Islamic law imposes on the Muslim partner the duty to see to this, and in a Muslim environment there is no escape from this islamizing pressure. Thus, after the Meenakshipuram mass conversion to Islam in 1981, non-converted villagers reported: "Of course, there have been marriages between Hindu harijans and the converts. (...) Whether it is the bride or the groom, the Hindu is expected to convert to Islam."[11]

Even when the conversion is an ineffective formality, such marriages or elopements which trumpet the message that Hindu identity is unimportant and dispensible, do have an unnerving effect on vulnerable Hindu communities in non-Hindu environments. They also remain an irritant to Hindus in

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[10] This scenario has been related to me by at least a dozen overseas Hindus in the UK and the USA; the Hindu revivalist publisher Arvind Ghosh (Houston, speaking to me in October 1995) told me that in the Houston area alone, he knew of over 30 cases of Hindu girls marrying Muslims to the dismay of their parents. Others, like RSS *prachârak* Rama Shastry from Los Angeles (October 1996), assured me that the magnitude of this problem is being exaggerated.

[11] Report in *Illustrated Weekly of India*, 6-2-1993, p.11. Likewise: "In Khairontoli [in the tribal belt near Ranchi], there are as many as 15 out of 28 families with 45 children whose fathers are Muslims and mothers Christian tribals. (...) But marriage is held in a unilinear direction, with Muslim boys tying the knot with Christian tribal girls and not vice-versa. Invariably, their offspring bear Islamic names." This report by Manoj Prasad was mis-titled: "Stupid Cupid sees not caste, creed in Bihar" (*Indian Express*, 23-1-1994), for what it shows is not at all that love overrules religious discrimination, on the contrary: even in these reported love marriages, Muslim families see to it that the dominant partner is Muslim, and that at any rate, the children are exclusively Muslim.

India, as here to Siva Prasad Ray. More generally, the doctrine that all religions are the same leaves Hindus intellectually defenceless before the challenge of communities with more determination to uphold and propagate their religions.

To counter the facile conclusion that Ramakrishna had "practised Christianity and Islam and proven their truth", Siva Prasad Ray points out that Ramakrishna was neither baptized nor circumcised, that he is not known to have affirmed the Christian or Islamic creed, etc. Likewise, he failed to observe Ramzan or Lent, he never took Christian or Islamic marriage vows with his wife, he never frequented churches or mosques. This objection is entirely valid: thinking about Christ or reading some Islamic book is not enough to be a Christian or a Muslim.

Equally to the point, he argues: "'Avatar' or incarnation may be acceptable to Hinduism but such is not the case with Islam or Christianity."[12] In Christianity, one might say that the notion of divine incarnation does exist, but it applies exclusively to Jesus Christ; applying it to Ramakrishna is plain heresy. Sitting down for mental concentration to obtain a "vision" of Christ or Mohammed is definitely not a part of the required practices of Christianity or Islam. Neither religion has a notion of "salvation" as something to be achieved by practising certain states of consciousness. In other words: before you claim to have an agreement with other people, check with them whether they really agree.

The same objection is valid against claims that Swami Vivekananda was "also" a Muslim, as Kundrakudi Adigalar, the 45th head of the Kundrakudi Tiruvannamalai Adhinam in Tamil Nadu, has said: "He had faith and confidence in Hinduism. But he was not a follower of Hinduism alone. He practised all religions. He read all books. His head bowed before all prophets."[13] But "practising all religions" is quite incompatible with being a faithful Christian or Muslim: as the Church Fathers taught, syncretism is typical of Pagan culture (today, it is called "New Age"). Leaving aside polytheistic Hinduism, the mere attempt to practise both Islam and Christianity, if such a thing were possible, would have stamped Ramakrishna as definitely not a Christian nor a Muslim.

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[12] S.P. Ray: *Wheel*, p.58.

[13] T.S. Subramanian: "A Secular Vivekananda. Interview with Kundrakudi Adigalar", *Frontline*, 12-3-1993.

Moreover, it is simply untrue that Swami Vivekananda ever "practised" Christianity or Islam: he was not baptized or circumcised, did not attend Church services or Friday prayers, never went to Mecca, never observed Ramzan or Lent. But he did practise vegetarianism (at least in principle)[14] and celibacy, which are both frowned upon in Islam. Worst of all, he did worship Hindu Gods, which by definition puts him outside the Islamic fold, Islam being based on the rejection of all Gods except Allah.

Ramakrishna was quite satisfied worshipping Goddess Kali, but: "There is no respectful place for deities in female form in Islam. Rama Krishna engaged in the worship of Kali was nothing but an idolater in the eyes of the Muslims. (...) Islam says that all idolaters will finally end up in Islam's hell. Now, I want to ask these egg-heads of *sarva-dharma-samabhâva* if they know where exactly is the place for Rama Krishna in Islam? The fact is that Rama Krishna never truly worshipped in the Islamic fashion, neither did he receive Islamic salvation."[15]

Ray challenges the RK Mission monks to try out their assertions on a Muslim or Christian audience: "All this is, thus, nothing but creations of confused and boisterous Hindu monks. No Christian *padre* or Muslim *maulvi* accepts Rama Krishna's salvation in their own religions. They make snide remarks. They laugh at the ignorance of the Hindu monks."[16] Ray makes the snide insinuation explicit: "Only those Hindus who do not understand the implications of other religions engage themselves in the propagation of *sarva-dharma-samabhâva*; like stupid and mentally retarded creatures, such Hindus revel in the pleasures of auto-erotism in their wicked pursuit of the fad."[17] This rude comparison means that they pretend to be interacting with others, but it is a mere fantasy, all inside their own heads, with the assumed partners not even knowing about it.[18]

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[14] When travelling in the US, Vivekananda ate whatever he was offered, including pork and beef. This is one more reason why his recognition as a "representative" of Hinduism at the 1893 Parliament of Religion in Chicago was out of order, a pure stroke of personal luck.

[15] S.P. Ray: *Wheel*, p.60.

Finally, Ray wonders what happened to the monks, those of the RK Mission and others, who talked about "equal truth of all religions" and chanted *"Râm Rahîm ek hai"* ("Rama and Rahim/Allah are one") and *"Ishwar Allâh tere nâm"* ("both Ishwara and Allah are Your names") in East Bengal before 1947. As far as he knows, they all fled across the new border when they suddenly found themselves inside Pakistan, but then: "Many a guru from East Bengal [who] has been saved by the skin of his teeth, once in West Bengal, resumed his talk of *sarva-dharma-samabhâva*. (...) But the point still remains that if they really had faith in the message of *sarva-dharma-samabhâva*, they would not have left East Bengal."[19] As so often in Indo-Pakistani and Hindu-Muslim comparisons, the argument is reminiscent of the inequality between the contenders in the Cold War: you could demonstrate for disarmament in the West, but to demonstrate for this in the East Bloc (except if it were for unilateral disarmament by the Western "war-mongers") would have put you in trouble.

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[16] S.P. Ray: *Wheel*, p.61.

[17] S.P. Ray: *Wheel*, p.63.

[18] At least one Muslim reply is known. Ram Swarup (*Ramakrishna Mission*, p.11) quotes an article "Ramakrishna and Islam" from an unnamed Bangladeshi journal, in which a Muslim author argues that Islam does not allow you to "take a holiday and spend a few days as a Muslim", because "the practice of Islam lasts till death. To embrace Islam and then leave it makes a man an apostate", an act which "is punished with death".

[19] S.P. Ray: *Wheel*, p.56.

Siva Prasad Ray also mocks the RK Mission's grandiose claim of having evaluated not just a few popular religions, but *all* religions: "Did Rama Krishna ever worship in accordance with Sikh, Buddhist, Jain, Saurya or Ganapatya principles? No, he did not. (...) Neither did he worship in accordance with the Jewish faith of Palestine, the Tao religion of China, the religion of Confucius, or the Shinto religion of Japan."[20] Empirically verifying the truth of each and every religion is a valid project in principle, but a very time-consuming one as well.

According to Ray, the slogan of "equal truth of all religions" is "nothing but a watered-down sentiment that means nothing. It is useful only in widening the route to our self-destruction. It does not take a genius to realise that not all paths are good paths in this life of ours; this is true in all branches of human activity."[21] Unlike the RK Mission monks, Ray has really found some common ground with other religions and with rationalism too: they all agree on the logical principle that contradictory truth claims cannot possibly all be right; at most one of them can be right.

To sum up, Ray alleges that the RK Mission stoops to a shameful level of self-deception and ridicule, that it distorts the message of Ramakrishna the Kali-worshipping Hindu, and that it distorts the heritage of Swami Vivekananda the Hindu revivalist. Yet, none of this alleged injustice to Hinduism gives the Mission a place outside Hinduism. After all, there is no definition of "Hindu" which precludes Hindus from being mistaken, self-deluding or suicidal. Regardless of its fanciful innovations, the RK Mission remains a Hindu organization, at least by any of the available objective definitions. Alternatively, if the subjective definition, "Is Hindu, he and only he who calls himself Hindu", is accepted, then of course the RK Mission, unlike its founders, is no longer Hindu,—but then it is no longer Ramakrishna's mission either.

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[20] S.P. Ray: *Wheel*, p.59. *Saurya*: devoted to *Sûrya*, the sun as deity; *Gaṇapatya*: devoted to *Gaṇapati*/Ganesha, the elephant-headed deity.

[21] S.P. Ray: *Wheel*, p.62.

The larger issue revealed by the incident with the RK Mission is a psychology of self-repudiation which is fairly widespread in the anglicized segment of Hindu society, stretching from actual repudiation of Hinduism to the distortive reformulation of Hinduism itself after the model of better-reputed religions. In a typical symptom of the colonial psychology, many Hindus see themselves through the eyes of their once-dominant enemies, so that catechism-type books on Hinduism explain Hinduism in Christian terms, e.g. by presenting many a Hindu saint as "a Christ-like figure".[22] Modern translations of Hindu scriptures are often distorted in order to satisfy non-Hindu requirements such as monotheism. This can take quite gross forms in the Veda translations of the Arya Samaj, where entire sentences are inserted in order to twist the meaning in the required theological direction. The eagerness to extol all rival religions and to be unsatisfied with just being Hindu is one more symptom of the contempt in which Hinduism has been held for centuries, and which numerous Hindus have interiorized.

6.4. Yogic value of Ramakrishna's visions

Ram Swarup reflects a bit a more deeply on the RK Mission lore about Ramakrishna's visions: "The students of Yoga know that 'visions' are of a limited value and they prove very little. (...) They tell us more about the visionary than about the object visioned."[23] In Christianity and Islam, visions have nothing to do with the respective concepts of salvation, and in the Hindu Yoga tradition, they are equally unimportant (unlike in Shamanism, where the "vision quest" is the central experience). If the RK Mission monks had known this common trait of each of the religions concerned, they would not have concluded to the equal truth of these religions on the basis of one individual's visions.

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[22] Sic in Viswanathan Edakkandiyal: *Daddy, Am I a Hindu?*, p.157.

[23] Ram Swarup: *Ramakrishna Mission*, p.11.

Even the sentimental theology of "equal truth of all religions" deserves a better basis than an individual's vision: "The fact is that the truth of harmony and human brotherhood derives not from an absorbed trance but from an awakened *prajñâ* or wisdom; and its validity depends not on any dramatic ecstatic visions but it belongs to man's (...) natural reason unspoilt by theologies of exclusiveness."[24] Universalist ideas are very much part of the general Hindu outlook, but are not conceived as depending on ecstatic experiences.

The luminosity of the faces visioned by Ramakrishna is again a normal element in the visions produced as a side-effect of yoga practice: "From the Yogic viewpoint also there was nothing unusual or extraordinary about Ramakrishna's visions of Jesus and Muhammad. When one meditates on the object (***karmasthâna***), it undergoes several successive modifications. It gets internalized; it loses its blemishes; it assumes a luminous form (*jyotishmatî*); it assumes a joyous form (***viśoka***). All this is a normal process of yogic modification and ingestion."[25]

The fact that images of Jesus and Mohammed passed through this mental process, "need not give birth to an indiscriminate theology like the one produced by the Mission—that all prophets and religions are equal and that they say the same thing".[26] Ram Swarup points out that yogic writings like Patanjali's *Yoga Sûtra* always stress the importance of careful observation and discrimination, quite the opposite of the facile and sweeping conclusions which the RK Mission monks draw from one or two alleged visions.

Ram Swarup offers, for contrast, the example of another luminary of the Bengal Hindu Renaissance, who did not lose his power of discrimination after having had visions: "Visions of a transcendental state have a limited phenomenal (*vyavahârika*) validity. For example, Sri Aurobindo, as a prisoner of the British, saw in the British jail, in the British judge and in the British prosecuting officer the veritable image of Vasudeva, but this did not invalidate the Indian struggle for independence nor the reality of British imperialism. There was no slurring over, no loss of discrimination."[27] Ram Swarup's point is: whatever Ramakrishna may have visualized concerning Mohammed, vigilance against Islam remains a foremost duty of responsible Hindus, for reasons which can be ascertained without reliance on ecstatic visions.

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[24] Ram Swarup: *Ramakrishna Mission*, p.13.

[25] Ram Swarup: *Ramakrishna Mission*, p.12.

[26] Ram Swarup: *Ramakrishna Mission*, p.12.

6.5. The verdict

In spite of all the arguments to the contrary offered by Hindus, the Calcutta High Court ruled in 1987 that the Ramakrishna Mission is a non-Hindu religious minority.[28] The public debate occasionally resumed and so did the court proceedings. When the case was taken to the Supreme Court, the Ramakrishna Mission submitted that "any attempt to equate the religion of Ramakrishna with the Hindu religion as professed and practised will be to defeat the very object of Ramakrishnaism and to deny his gospel."[29]

In 1995, the Supreme Court had the final say and ruled that "Ramakrishnaism" is a branch of Hinduism.[30] As *Hinduism Today* reported: "On July 2nd, 1995, the Supreme Court of India declared that neither Sri Ramakrishna nor Swami

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[27] Ram Swarup: *Ramakrishna Mission*, p.12, with reference to Aurobindo's *Uttarpara Speech*. *Vâsudeva*, "son of Vasudeva", is Krishna's patronym.

[28] Details in M.D. McLean: "Are Ramakrishnaites Hindus? Some implications of recent litigation on the question", in *South Asia*, 1991/2.

[29] Quoted in *Hinduism Today*, Sep. 1995, p.1.

[30] The international monthly *Hinduism Today* (Honolulu), Sep. 1995, captioned this news as "Ramakrishna Mission Wins!" (viz. wins back its true Hindu identity).

Vivekananda founded any independent, non-Hindu religion. Thus ended the RK Mission's labyrinthine attempt to gain the privileges accorded only to minority religions in India, specifically the right to manage their extensive educational institutions free from government control."[31]

The verdict came with an unexpected rider, disappointing the West Bengal Government and considerably sweetening the defeat for the RK Mission: "Despite the legal loss, the court's decision surprisingly allows the RK Mission to retain control of its schools in Bengal. This was not by virtue of any constitutional provision, but rather because the law in Bengal regarding the governing of schools specifically exempted the RK Mission schools from government control."[32]

All those concerned about Hindu unity heaved a sigh of relief. In a last skirmish, the Mission's office-bearer Swami Hiranmayananda polemicized with Ram Swarup and denied that Swami Vivekananda had ever expressed pride in Hinduism. Ram Swarup now only had to quote the Supreme Court verdict, which had quoted Vivekananda a number of times to this very effect, e.g.: "Say it with pride: we are Hindus."[33] Another clinching quotation from Ramakrishna himself was that "various creeds you hear about nowadays have come into existence through the will of God and will disappear again through His will (...) Hindu religion alone is

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[31] "India's Supreme Court to RK Mission: You're Hindus", *Hinduism Today*, Sep. 1995.

[32] "India's Supreme Court to RK Mission: You're Hindus", *Hinduism Today*, Sep. 1995.

[33] *Organiser* published Ram Swarup's initial comment on the verdict on 13-8-1995 (also in *Observer of Business and Politics*: "Faith denied or identity regained?"), Hiranmayananda's reply on 24-9-1995, and Ram Swarup's final rejoinder on 8-10-1995. Reference is to Vivekananda's *Complete Works*, vol.3, p.368-69. Incidentally, no less a secularist than Jawaharlal Nehru testifies (*Discovery of India*, p.337) that Vivekananda was a "Hindu sannyasin" and that "in America, he was called the 'cyclonic Hindu'".

Sanâtana dharma" for it "has always existed and will always exist".[34]

Ram Swarup remarks that none of the Ramakrishna Mission spokesmen have been able to point out even one instance where Ramakrishna or Vivekananda expressed a desire to give up Hinduism or to start a new religion. For, as so often, Ram Swarup and other Hindus had in fact accepted the burden of proof by taking the trouble of proving the Hinduness of Ramakrishna and Vivekananda, when that burden was logically on those who made the totally new claim about "Ramakrishnaism". Now the court case had exposed the Mission's inability to discharge its own burden of proof and to offer even the faintest evidence of Ramakrishna's desire (let alone decision, let alone implementation of the decision) to found a new religion separate from Hinduism. The evidence offered by the Mission consisted entirely of testimonies by outsiders (Romain Rolland, Arnold Toynbee, even Lenin) to the "universal spirit" of Ramakrishna or Vivekananda, but even these Westerners (still a source of authority) could not be quoted as attesting any *repudiation* of Hinduism.

But the Supreme Court verdict was only a battle won, and the war continues. Ram Swarup observes: "Though it took shape under particular circumstances, the RK Mission now has an articulated philosophy of being non-Hindu, a veritable manifesto of separation. (...) Now that it is forcefully articulated, the case for separation could exert a continuing influence on the minds of RK Mission authorities. (...) Pseudo-secularism is abroad, and under its auspices *Hinduism* is a dirty word, and disowning Hinduism is deemed both prestigious and profitable. Those ideological conditions still obtain, and no court can change them. (...) In trying to prove that it was non-Hindu, [the Mission] spoke quite negatively of Hinduism (...) Can the RK Mission outlive this manifesto of separation?"[35]

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[34] Culled by the judges from the testimonial collection *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, then quoted by Ram Swarup in "Ramakrishna Mission: identity recovered", *Organiser*, 21-7-1996, written in reply to a statement by RSS man P. Parameswaran, President of the Vivekananda Kendra, who defended the RK Mission's stand with reference to the impression that its very existence was threatened.

In Ram Swarup's view, the RK Mission's problem with being Hindu is but a particular symptom of a widespread and deep-seated trauma: "We will do well to remember that Hinduism has passed through a thousand years of foreign domination. During these centuries, its deepest ideas and its cherished institutions were under great attack. The trauma of this period produced deep psychological scars. Hindus have lost self-confidence. They have become passive and apologetic—apologetic about their ideas, their institutions, about themselves and about their very name. They behave as if they are making amends for being Hindus."[36] This, then, is the fundamental problem underlying the intellectual and political ferment which in the present study we are seeking to map out and understand. And such a large-scale problem will take time to find its solution.

6.6. Is the Arya Samaj Hindu?

Many Hindus feared that a different outcome in the RK Mission court case might have had a disastrous precedent value for other organizations with a weak Hindu self-identification. Jagmohan, former Governor of Jammu & Kashmir and a hero of the Hindutva movement, comments: "Had the Supreme Court come to the same conclusion as the Calcutta High Court, many more sects and denominations would have appeared on the scene claiming positions outside Hinduism and thereby causing further fragmentation of the Hindu society."[37]

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[35] Ram Swarup: "The RK Mission: judging the judgment", guest editorial in *Hinduism Today*, Sep. 1995.

[36] Ram Swarup: "The RK Mission: judging the judgment", guest editorial in *Hinduism Today*, Sep. 1995.

[37] Jagmohan: "Hinduism and Article 30", *Organiser*, 6-8-1995.

Then again, perhaps the effect of a recognition of the RK Mission as a minority would not have been nearly as dramatic as Jagmohan expected, for in several states, another Hindu reformist organization has enjoyed minority status for decades without triggering the predicted exodus. Jagmohan himself has noted a case where "the temptations in-built in Article 30 impelled the followers of Arya Samaj to request the Delhi High Court to accord the status of a minority religion" but "the Division Bench of the Delhi High Court rightly rejected the contention of the Arya Samaj".[38] However, as early as 1971, the Arya Samaj gained the status of "minority" in Panjab. Then already, it had that status in Bihar, along with the Brahmo Samaj.[39]

In a way, the Arya Samaj *is* a minority: the Arya-Samajis are fewer in number than the non-Arya-Samajis.[40] By this criterion, every Hindu sect is a minority, and every Hindu school which calls itself "Shaiva school" or "Ram bhakta school" would pass as a minority institution, protected by Art.30. But that is of course not how the courts and the legislators have understood it: in principle, all Hindu minorities within the Hindu majority are deprived of the privileges accorded to the "real" minorities.

In Swami Dayananda's view, the term *Arya* was not coterminous with the term *Hindu*. The classical meaning of the word *Arya* is "noble". It is used as an honorific term of address, used in addressing the honoured ones in ancient

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[38] Jagmohan: "Meaning, message and might of Hinduism", *Organiser*, 10-9-1995.

[39] Related by Edward A. Gargar: "Peril to the Indian State: a defiant Hindu fervor", in Arvind Sharma: *Our Religions*, p.54.

[40] A more principled Arya separatism also exists among Arya Samaj individuals, see D. Vable: *The Arya Samaj*, which emphasizes its distinctive traits and its quarrels with traditionalists. But Arya Sarvadeshik Pratinidhi Sabha president Vandematharam Ramachandra Rao assured me (interview, 1995) that the official position still defines the Arya Samaj as a reform movement of Hinduism, whatever its legal status for practical (educational) purposes may be.

Indian parlance.[41] The term *Hindu* is reluctantly accepted as a descriptive term for the contemporary Hindu society and all its varied beliefs and practices, while the term *Arya* is normative and designates *Hinduism as it ought to be.* Swami Dayananda's use of the term *Arya* is peculiar in that he excludes the entire Puranic (as opposed to the Vedic) tradition from its semantic domain, i.e. the major part of contemporary Hinduism. Elsewhere in Hindu society, "*Arya*" was and is considered a synonym for "*Hindu*", except that it may be *broader*, viz. by unambiguously including Buddhism and Jainism. Thus, the Constitution of the "independent, indivisible and sovereign monarchical Hindu kingdom" (Art.3:1) of Nepal takes care to include the Buddhist minority by ordaining the king to uphold "*Aryan* culture and Hindu religion" (Art.20:1).[42] Either way, the semantic kinship of the two terms implies that the group which chose to call itself Arya Samaj is a movement to reform Hinduism (viz. to bring it up to *Arya* standards), and not another or a newly invented religion.

The Arya Samaj's misgivings about the term *Hindu* already arose *in tempore non suspecto*, long before it became a dirty word under Jawaharlal Nehru and a cause of legal disadvantage under the 1950 Constitution. Swami Dayananda Saraswati rightly objected that the term had been given by foreigners (who, moreover, gave all kinds of derogatory meanings to it), and considered that dependence on an exonym is a bit sub-standard for a highly literate and self-expressive civilization. This argument retains a certain validity: the self-identification of Hindus as "Hindu" can never be more than a second-best option. On the other hand, it is the most practical choice in the short run, and most Hindus don't seem to pine for an alternative.

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[41] Via Pali *ayya* and Apabhramsha *ajje*, we see the word evolve to become the modern honorific suffix *-jî*, as in *Gândhî-jî*. It is well-known in Buddhist expressions like the *Chatvâri-ârya-satyâni*, the "four noble truths", the *Arya-ashtâṅgika-mârga*, the "noble eightfold path", and *Arya Dharma*.

[42] A. Peaslee: *Constitutions of Nations*, p.772 and 778.

6.7. Are travelling gurus Hindus?

A somewhat special case is that of the travelling Hindu gurus in the West. They don't have to worry about Article 30 or the Communist government in Kolkata, but they do have to fine-tune their communication strategy vis-à-vis the Western public. Usually they claim that their yoga is "universal"[43], often also that it "can be combined with other religions". Thus, in a popular self-presentation video of Maharishi Mahesh Yogi's Transcendental Meditation (a.k.a. the Science of Creative Intelligence), a Christian pastor is interviewed and he testifies that he has deepened his Christian faith with the help of TM. In the West, weary and wary of religious labels, this seems to be a more successful strategy than an explicit attempt at conversion would be.

The International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) generally denies that it is Hindu, in spite of practising purely Hindu rituals and a purely Hindu lifestyle in the service of a purely Hindu god.[44] That this policy is guided by petty calculations of self-interest is clear from the cases where ISKCON exceptionally does claim to be Hindu, viz. when collecting money from Hindus.

A former ISKCON member explains: that ISKCON is non-Hindu "is clearly evident in the writings and lectures of Srila Prabhupada, ISKCON's founder, as well as in the day-to-day preaching statements of its members and current-day leaders. What is especially troubling is that ISKCON periodically does claim to be a Hindu organization. Unfortunately, these claims on the part of ISKCON occur when, and only when, it serves the legal and financial interests of the sect. Thousands of unsuspecting Indian Hindus have been persuaded to contribute funds to the group with the reassurance that they were supporting 'Hinduism', 'Hindu' temples and the printing of 'Hindu' books."[45]

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[43] Far from marking a religion as non-Hindu, tall claims of universalism are typical of modern Hinduism, e.g. this one by Prof. M.M. Sankhdher ("Musings on Hinduism", *Organiser*, 7-12-1997): "Hinduism is an all-embracing, comprehensive, universal, human religion which preaches love for all creations—humans, animals, plants and inanimates."

[44] "Why do Hindus say, 'I'm not a Hindu'?", *Hinduism Today*, October 1998.

But these peculiar elements of separatism in this sect or that can only occur because of the general background of the depreciation of Hindu identity. In Christianity and Islam, only the reverse case exists: sects claiming to be Christian (Mormons) or Muslim (Ahmadiyas, Alevites) but being denied that label by the orthodox. The day Hinduism gets respected again, these sects will probably reaffirm their Hindu identity, and the RK Mission will preface its publications with Vivekananda's appeal: "Say with pride, We are Hindus!"

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[45] Frank Morales: "Appalled and disgusted", letter, *Hinduism Today*, January 1999.

7. Are Jains Hindus?

7.1. Jains in the Minorities' Commission

One of the least vocal communities in India is the Jain community. When the Minorities' Commission was formed in 1978, the Jains were somehow overlooked, though Sikhs and Buddhists were invited to join. No Jain protest was heard. It seemed that as a prosperous business community, the Jains were not too interested in the politics of grievances, and therefore they didn't care too much whether they were entitled to minority status. In 1996, however, a delegation of prominent Jains submitted a memorandum to Prime Minister Deve Gowda requesting recognition of the Jain community as a religious minority.[1] In 1997, the Minorities' Commission did invite the Jains.

The Sangh Parivar was angry at the 1997 move, though it merely confirmed the minority status accorded to the Jains in the Constitution (Art.25). The RSS weekly *Organiser* went out of its way to collect pro-Hindu statements from Jain sages and lay authorities. Thus: "Jain saint Acharya Tulsi has categorically asserted the Jains to be an integral part of Hindu society. In a statement released here, the Acharya asked the Jains to desist from any attempts to put them among minority communities. Hinduism is not a specific religion but refers to nationality or society, according to him."[2]

So far, nothing has been gained: if "Hindu" merely means "Indian" (as the Sangh Parivar often claims), then Acharya

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[1] "The Jain Community's Memorandum to the Prime Minister", *Muslim India*, Nov. 1996, p.522.

[2] Subhas Dev: "Jains are Hindus", *Organiser*, 25-5-1997.

Tulsi's assertion amounts to no more than the trivial claim that Jains are Indians. It becomes more pertinent when he adds: "In a Hindu family, one member can be a Vaishnavite, another an Arya Samaji and yet another a Jain, all belonging to Hindu society".[3] Another Jain Muni, Anuvarta Anushasta Ganadhipati Acharya "pointed out that Jainism is an inseparable part of Hinduism, even though it believes in a different way of worship, follows distinct *samskâras* and has its own spiritual books".[4] And Sadhvi Dr. Sadhana, who leads the Acharya Sushil Kumar Ashram in Delhi, asserted that "the Jains and the other Hindus are the inheritors of a common heritage".[5]

The Jains are divided in a few castes, some of which intermarry with (and are thereby biologically part of) Hindu merchant castes: Jain Agarwals marry Hindu Agarwals but not Jain Oswals.[6] They function as part of the merchant castes in the larger Hindu caste scheme. If the observance of caste endogamy is taken as a criterion of Hinduism, then Jains are Hindus by that criterion. In September 2001, the Rajasthan High Court ruled that the Jains are Hindus, not a separate non-Hindu minority; but in some other states they are counted as a separate minority. Clearly, there is no consensus about this in lay society.

7.2. Jains in Hindu Revivalism

Given the actual participation of Jains in Hindu society, it is no surprise that we find Jains well-represented in the Hindu

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[3] Subhas Dev: "Jains are Hindus", *Organiser*, 25-5-1997.

[4] Quoted thus in *Organiser*, 9-3-1997.

[5] Thus quoted in *Organiser*, 9-3-1997.

[6] The origin of the Oswals is that in AD 564, the Rajputs of Osian or Os, near Jodhpur, adopted Jainism along with *Vaiśyadharma* (the trader caste duties), renouncing their Kshatriya (knightly) status and occupation, deemed incompatible with Jain non-violence. The Agarwals were originally, and since hoary antiquity, a republican clan in East Panjab, the Agrashreni mentioned by the Mahabharata and by Panini, and centred in Agrodaka (modern Agroha) and Rohtiki (modern Rohtak).

Revivalist movement, either formally, e.g. J.K. Jain, BJP media specialist and MP in 1991-96, and Sunderlal Patwa, Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister in 1990-93, or informally, e.g. the late Girilal Jain, sacked in 1988 as *Times of India* editor when he developed Hindutva sympathies, and his daughters Meenakshi Jain and Sandhya Jain.

In a collection of Girilal Jain's columns on the triangular Hindu-Muslim-secularist struggle (that is how he understood the "communal" problem)[7], we find his explicit rejection of Jain separateness: "Though not to the same extent as in the case of Sikhs, (...) neo-Buddhists and at least some Jains have come to regard themselves as non-Hindus. In reality, however, Buddhism and Jainism have been no more than movements within the larger body of Hinduism."[8] According to Girilal Jain, what difference there was between Brahmins and Jain renouncers has been eliminated by competitive imitation, e.g.: "the Brahman would have adopted vegetarianism so as not to be outdone by the renouncer qua spiritual leader".[9] Whatever schisms may have taken place in the distant past, the ultimate origin is common, and ever since, co-existence was too close to allow for permanent separateness.

When BJP President Murli Manohar Joshi visited the predominantly Jain Indian diamond community in Antwerp (August 1992), someone in the audience asked him whether Jains are Hindus. Pat came his reply: "Jains are the best Hindus of all."

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[7] Editor Meenakshi Jain opens the posthumous collection of her father Girilal Jain's columns by announcing (*The Hindu Phenomenon*, p.v): "Girilal Jain belonged to that minority of Indian intellectuals who welcomed the movement for the Ram temple as part of the process of Hindu self-renewal and self-affirmation."

[8] G. Jain: *The Hindu Phenomenon*, p.24-25.

[9] G. Jain: *The Hindu Phenomenon*, p.26, quoting Louis Dumont: *Homo Hierarchicus*, p.194.

7.3. Dayananda Saraswati on Jainism

When considered at the doctrinal level, Jainism may have some aspects which mainstream Hindus would disagree with. But the Sangh Parivar has a policy of deliberate indifference to inter-Hindu disputes, aiming first of all at uniting all sections of Hindu society "including" Jainism. The only written argument against Jainism by Hindu revivalists was developed more than a century ago by the Arya Samaj.

In the introduction to his *Light of Truth*, Swami Dayananda tones down the polemical thrust of the chapters devoted to other religions and sects: "Just as we have studied the Jain and Buddhist scriptures, the Puranas, the Bible and the Qoran with an unbiased mind, and have accepted what is good in them and rejected what is false, and endeavour for the betterment of all mankind, it behoves all mankind to do likewise. We have but very briefly pointed out the defects of these religions."[10]

Many schools of thought and religious traditions which contemporary Hindutva ideologues and even some outside observers would readily include in "Hinduism", as part of the prolific offspring of the ancient Vedic tradition, are rejected in strong terms by the Arya Samaj. This class of substandard varieties of Hinduism includes the Puranic tradition and Sikhism.[11] With even more emphasis, the Arya Samaj rejects the *Nâstika* or non-Vedic traditions. Chapter 12 of *Light of Truth* is titled: "An exposition and a refutation of the Charvaka, the Buddhistic and the Jain faiths, all of which are atheistic".[12]

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[10] Dayananda: *Light of Truth*, p.vii.

[11] Criticized together in Ch.11 of Dayananda: *Light of Truth*.

[12] It is a different matter that Dayananda's equation of "*nâstika*" with "atheistic" is inaccurate. Buddhism is agnostic rather than atheistic, while theistic Islam can definitely be included in the *nâstika* category because it does not pay any respect to the Veda. Conversely, dualist Samkhya cosmology is atheistic but not materialistic nor nastika.

The Charvaka ("polemicist") sect, founded in pre-Buddhist antiquity by one Brihaspati, can be considered a cornerstone in the spectrum of Indian philosophies because of its radical clarity in proposing one of the possible extremes in cosmology, viz. atheistic materialism.[13] The several materialistic schools of ancient Indian philosophy have naturally been highlighted by Marxist scholars, even with a streak of patriotic pride.[14] The ancient Indian atheists are also quite popular as reference among crusading "rationalists", i.e. people devoted to debunking claims of the paranormal, quite active in South India.[15] For this reason, they belong to the pantheon of the political parties which subscribe to "rationalism": Dravida Kazhagam (Dravidian Federation, DK), Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (Dravidian Progressive Federation, DMK) and Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (C. Annadurai's Dravidian Progressive Federation, ADMK), Tamil chauvinist parties which are (or were) anti-Brahminical and anti-religious promoters of "rationalism".[16]

By contrast, since it has been extinct as a separate sect for centuries, Indian Materialism does not figure in modern

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[13] See also the chapter "Concept of Materialism" in M.G. Chitkara: *Hindutva*, p.23-32.

[14] E.g. Debiprasad Chattopadhyaya: *Lokâyata, a Study in Ancient Indian Materialism* (1959) and *In Defence of Materialism in Ancient India, a Study in Cârvâka/Lokâyata* (1989).

[15] About the Indian "rationalists", a documentary was made by Robert Eagle and Adam Finch (broadcast on Flemish TV: BRTN TV 1, 26-1-1997). One of their leading lights was Abraham Kovoor, whose booklets debunking magic tricks employed by godmen or presenting the case against astrology (e.g. *Begone Godmen!*, 1976) are fairly popular. Another is V.R. Narla, see e.g. his polemical book *The Truth about the Gita*.

[16] See e.g. DK spokesman K. Veeramani's Tamil rationalist paper *Viduthalai*, or his attack on the Shankaracharya: *Kanchi Sankarachariar, Saint or Sectarian?* However, the DMK and ADMK have moved back to religion, still the mainstream in India: "No longer the 'rationalists' they once were, DMK leaders are realising that when your intention is to get votes, anti-religion ideology has to take a back seat", according to G.C. Shekhar: "In Search of God", *India Today*, 28-2-1997.

Hindutva discourse, except as a referent to contemporary secular materialism. It is nevertheless part of an atheistic-agnostic doctrinal continuum to which Jainism and Buddhism also belong, and for that reason, some references to it may appear in the following survey of Dayananda's argumentation. The major part of this critique is directed against Jainism rather than Buddhism. The reason for this may simply be that Dayananda was more familiar with Jainism as a living presence in society, at a time when Buddhism was practically extinct in India.

Contrary to Dayananda's refutations of Christianity and Islam, his critique of Jainism and Buddhism is limited to certain highbrow points of philosophy, and avoids attacks on the morality of the founder or on the humanity of the religion's historical career. We leave the scholastic points on the epistemology and metaphysics of the Nastika schools undiscussed because they are hardly relevant for the effective relationship between the communities concerned, and because similar differences of opinion can easily be found within Vedic Hinduism itself, e.g. between dualist and non-dualist Vedanta.[17] In this section on Jainism, we will consider the general argument of religion against atheism, of rationalism against irrational beliefs and practices,- and the argument against Shramanic sectarianism.

7.4. Philosophical materialism in India

Chapter 12 of the *Light of Truth* starts with the classical counter-arguments against the equally classical arguments of atheism and materialism.[18] Thus, against the position that the conscious subject (Self) dies along with the body, which makes short work of the notions of eternal soul, afterlife or reincarnation, Dayananda develops the well-known argument in defence of the soul as an entity separable from the body at death: "Your so-called elements are devoid of consciousness, therefore consciousness cannot result from their combination."[19] Like begets like, so matter cannot generate non-matter, yet non-matter (consciousness) is an observed fact of life, *ergo* there must be an entity which exists apart from matter. The conscious subject is an entity separate from the body and not bound to die along with it.[20]

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[17] E.g., on Buddhist epistemology, see Dayananda: *Light of Truth*, p.512-520.

[18] Dayananda: *Light of Truth*, p. 503-506, 525-545.

We cannot hope to settle a debate on such a fundamental philosophical question as the "mind-brain problem" here, and will be satisfied with noting that Dayananda uses the classical argument of religious people against this type of materialism. The point is that his is not necessarily the only "Hindu" position. Indeed, those who like to argue for the "tolerance" of Hinduism (including those Hindutva authors who defend the position that Hinduism and fundamentalism are intrinsically incompatible) often claim that "a Hindu can even be an atheist". Thus, Balraj Madhok writes: "The theist and the atheist, the sceptic and agnostic may all be Hindus if they accept the Hindu system of culture and life."[21] On this premiss, it becomes much easier to include atheist Jainism in Hinduism.

Surprisingly, even in the hard core of Brahmanical ritualism, we find a strong atheist element. The highly orthodox ritualists of the Purva Mimamsa school developed the doctrine that the Gods, to whom sacrifices were made in expectation of their auspicious intervention, were mere terms used to label the unseen phase (in modern terms, the "black box") of the purely mechanical process which leads from the ritual performed to the materialization of the effects desired.[22] They were possibly the first deliberate atheists in world history, yet they were *Âstikas*, followers of the Veda.

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[19] Dayananda: *Light of Truth*, p.504.

[20] We may consider it beyond the present endeavour to confront this argument with advanced scientific notions of a degree of consciousness present in all material life-forms (the feed-back mechanisms inherent in biological processes could be considered as a very material form of consciousness) and even in the behaviour of quantum-physical particles. More immediately relevant is the fact that modern neuro-psychologists are strongly inclined towards accepting the materiality of consciousness: they consider thoughts as a mere function of chemical processes in the brain, as suggested by the causal relationship between depression and lack of vitamins, or between altered states of consciousness and the intake of certain drugs. See e.g. Karl Popper & John Eccles: *The Self and Its Brain*, and Daniel C. Dennett: *Consciousness Explained*.

[21] Balraj Madhok: *Rationale of Hindu State*, p.20, with reference to S. Radhakrishnan.

Dayananda, by contrast, made it clear that he did not want to be associated with atheists, and that the Arya Samaj was a crusading force against atheism. Here we are faced with the fact that Dayananda had no intention of representing the broadest possible spectrum of Hinduism, unlike the Hindutva movement. He was a purist who rejected as unauthentic or un-Aryan all the Nastika (and, at least implicitly, even some Astika) traditions which did not conform to his own conception of Vedic doctrine.

Against the doctrines which reject or simply ignore the notion of a Creator-God, Dayananda argues: "Dead and inert substances cannot combine together of their own accord and according to some design unless the Conscious Being—God—fashions and shapes them."[23]

At the time of his writing, it was probably too early for a provincial Indian pandit to realize the implications of the findings of modern science. We see dead substances combine and recombine all the time: even before the first life forms appeared on earth, a lot of chemical processes took place which scientists have explained entirely in terms of the Laws of Nature, without needing the hypothesis of divine intervention. At face value, Dayananda's point seems to be close to the medieval idea that the planets could only move because of angels pushing them forward; but a more sophisticated reading of his view would be that at least the first beginnings of life and of the physical processes require some kind of divine intervention. Ultimately, the planets and the force of gravity which explains their motions, and more generally all substances and the Laws of Nature which govern them, cannot have come into being without being created by a Creator.

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[22] Vide e.g. Lucas Catherine: *De gelaagde religie* (Dutch: "The layered religion"), Ch.8.

[23] Dayananada: *Light of Truth*, p.508.

The claim that nothing exists without a cause, and that the world itself must therefore have a "cause", viz. a divine Creator, is one of the classical proofs of the existence of God, the main proof for Muslims and one of the five proofs given by Saint Thomas Aquinas.[24] The atheist counter-argument is that if an eternal entity is admitted, viz. the one which theists call God, then the universe itself might just as well be that eternal and uncreated entity.[25] But Dayananda was entirely unaware of the philosophical debates which had taken place in the West, and was not very broadly informed even about those in India.

7.5. The ethical argument for God

Another argument well-known to Western debaters on the existence of God is the ethical argument: without any kind of punishment and reward, people will not be motivated to do good and shun evil, and since the history of the world tells us about numerous good people ending in misery and evil people enjoying success, the just punishment or reward has to be meted out by God in some future life (whether in heaven or in new incarnations).[26] According to Dayananda: "If there were no God (the giver of the fruits of their deeds to souls), no soul will ever, of its own free will, suffer punishment for their crimes." Dayananda compares it with burglars who will not volunteer for getting punished, "it is the law that compels them to do so; in like manner, it is God Who makes the soul reap the fruits of its actions, good or bad, otherwise all order will be lost; in other words, one soul will do deeds while the other will reap the fruits thereof."[27]

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[24] However, as Immanuel Kant admitted, this proof is inconclusive; discussed in e.g. Hubert Dethier: *Geschiedenis van het Atheïsme* ("History of Atheism"), p.20-21.

[25] As argued in Bertrand Russell: *Why I Am Not a Christian* (and again countered in the review of that book by T.S. Eliot, etc.), and in India by Jain and Buddhist philosophers, e.g. Dharmakirtti, see Chandradhar Sharma: *Critical Survey of Indian Philosophy*, p.139-140, para "Criticism of God".

[26] E.g. figuring prominently in the historical BBC debate on God between Frederick Copleston s.j. and Bertrand Russell, 28-1-1948, discussed in Caroline Moorehead: *Bertrand Russell*, p.458.

Dayananda's argument is unlikely to convince those who hold the opposite view. Indeed, one can think up several ways in which people do "reap the fruits of their actions" without requiring divine intervention, in a purely mechanical way. Jains conceive of Karma as a mechanical process, in which experiences in this life are preserved in seed form to determine the contents of one's next life, without any need for a personal God who records man's sins and metes out appropriate punishment at some later time. They share Dayananda's moralistic view that any good we do is ultimately rewarded and any evil we do is ultimately paid for, but they are satisfied with their non-theistic model of explanation.

Alternatively, the non-moralistic possibility should be faced that we are *not* bound to "reap the fruits of our actions": if you kill someone, *he* definitely reaps the fruits of *your* action, viz. by losing his life, and that is where the causal chain ends. You yourself also reap indirectly in the form of that which you wanted to take from the murdered man (the money he carried, the shared secret which he threatened to divulge, etc.), but you are not going to undergo punishment for this murder unless the human law machinery catches up with you. It is perfectly conceivable, as indeed the Indian Materialists hold, that there is no justice in this world except as a human artefact, that evil is not punished nor good rewarded except (with luck) in this lifetime by ordinary human means.[28]

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[27] Dayananda: *Light of Truth*, p.531. The expression "God, the giver of the fruits of their deeds to the souls" is an allusion to the etymology of the word *Bhagvân*, effectively "the Lord", literally "the share-giver".

In that case, ethical behaviour comes without future reward, whether divine or mechanical. Or rather, it will have to be its own reward, by giving a feeling of serenity, peace of mind. This approach is a lot closer to what we can glimpse of the original Vedic conception of ethics than the "divine punishment"-mongering which the alleged Veda fundamentalist Dayananda offers. The Rigveda, at least, is a very unmoralistic book. It praises certain virtues (generosity, truthfulness etc.) without trying to lure anyone into practising them: those who don't practise them merely reveal their own ignoble character, but they are not threatened with any divine punishment for that. This is but one of many occasions at which Dayananda holds theistic and moralistic opinions which are classically enunciated not in his revered Vedas but in the reviled Puranas and Smritis.

At any rate, anyone familiar with the old debate about the existence of God and related fundamental questions will notice that Dayananda is not offering any compelling argument to make committed atheists change their minds.

7.6. With the Jains against priestcraft

Swami Dayananda is in agreement with the Nastikas on another issue which figures prominently in standard atheist discourse: the absurdity and non-efficacity of funeral rites and other priestly practices. He welcomes the atheist argument that if one can benefit one's ancestors in heaven by throwing food into the fire, how come one cannot save a relative on his journey through the desert from hunger and thirst by similar means?[29] Thus, "the practice of offering oblations to the manes of departed ancestors is an invention of priests, because it is opposed to the Vedic and Shastric teachings and finds sanction in the Puranas (...) Yes, it is true that the priests have devised these funeral rites from motives of pecuniary gain but, being opposed to the Vedas, they are condemnable."[30]

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[28] I have discussed the non-moralistic as well as the atheist-moralistic views of Karma in my Philosophy thesis: *De niet-retributieve Karma-leer*, Leuven 1991.

[29] Dayananda: *Light of Truth*, p.507.

On this point, the contrast between the Arya Samaj and the contemporary RSS Parivar is complete: whereas the latter tries to group all Hindus and implicitly condones all existing Hindu religious practices, the former takes objection to everything which, in its opinion, is not well-attested in the Vedas. Veer Savarkar rejected all superstitious practices too, and even forbade any funeral rites for his own departed soul, but he never waged an ideological campaign against such practices, as this would have greatly harmed his effort to unite all Hindus. In the case of the RSS Parivar, the same concern for unity stands in the way of this type of religious purism, except when it comes to superstitions which directly affect the unity effort, most notably untouchability, or which harm Hindu interests otherwise, e.g. the taboo on widow remarriage with its negative effect on the Hindu birth rate.

However, the "protestant" objections to priestcraft, which are in effect similar to Luther's objections against Roman Catholic practices, do not define an antagonism between Hinduism (even if limited to the Vedic tradition) on the one and Jainism and Buddhism on the other hand. The antagonism between ritualists and non-ritualists cuts through both Hinduism and the Shramanic traditions. The shift in emphasis from Vedic *Karmakâṇḍa* (ritual) to *Jñânakâṇḍa* (contemplation) is a central theme of the Upanishads, while Buddhism, supposedly a revolt against empty ritualism (among other things), had its limited array of non-icon-centred rituals from the beginning, and soon developed its own rich array of rituals in temples before impressive Buddha statues, culminating in the near-suffocation of silent meditation by endless rituals in Tibetan Tantric Buddhism.

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[30] Dayananda: *Light of Truth*, p.509.

Jainism, too, has its network of temples where idols of the 24 Tirthankaras ("ford-makers", founding saints of Jainism) are venerated.

The Arya Samaj itself, though professing a decided skepticism (which most Westerners would readily qualify as "healthy") vis-à-vis *mûrti-pûjâ* (idol-worship), pilgrimages and other rituals, has some rituals of its own. Indeed, rather than being a rationalistic rejection of all ritual per se, it represents a restoration of Vedic ritual to the detriment of rival ritual practices. If the ritual of feeding the departed souls is incapable of affecting the souls of the deceased, why should the Arya/Vedic ritual of Homa or Agnihotra be taken to have any effect upon any being whether living or dead? Here, we are faced with the common phenomenon that apologists of a religion are very rationalistic when it comes to evaluating the supernatural claims of rival traditions, but do not extend the same logic to an evaluation of their own doctrine.

7.7. Critique of Jain chronology

Another example of the same tendency to judge others by more exacting standards of rationality than one's own tradition is Dayananda's critique of Jain chronology. The 24 Jain Tirthankaras, among whom the historical teacher Parshvanath is listed as 23rd and Mahavira Jina as 24th, are credited with astronomical lifetimes and body sizes, e.g. the first in the list, Rishabhadeva (claimed to be attested in the Vedas)[31] was 500 *dhanush* (= 500 × ca. 2 metres) tall and lived for 8,400,000 years. Dayananda laboriously criticizes this scriptural hyperbole, and additionally blames it for similarly grotesque claims in the Puranas: "Let the wise consider if it is possible for any man to have so gigantic a body and to live so long. If the globe were inhabited by people of such dimensions, very few would be contained in it. Following the example of the *Jainees*, the *Pauraniks* have written of persons who lived for 10,000 years and even for 100,000 years. All this is absurd and so is what the Jainees say."[32]

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[31] Mention of Rishabha in the Yajurveda (*"Om nama arhato Rishabho..."*), along with two from the Vishnu and Bhagavata Puranas, are given as proof for the pre-Vedic antiquity of Jainism by T.K. Tukol: *Compendium of Jainism*, p.11-12. However, the oldest mention of one Rishabha is inside the Rigveda, and not even in the oldest part: Rishabha, son of Vishvamitra, is listed as composer of hymns 3:13 and 3:14 to Agni; there is nothing typically Jain about these hymns. For all we know, the Vedic Rishabha is not the same person as the founder of Jainism.

True, if ever there was a human being called Rishabhadeva, he probably lived for less than 8 million years. But if the Jain tradition is highly unrealistic at this point, how should we judge Dayananda's claim that the four Vedas were given in complete form at the time of Creation itself? This claim, made in accordance with a long-standing Vedic tradition, implies a rejection of any historical interpretation of all factual mundane data (e.g. the Battle of the Ten Kings, sung in the Rigveda). It necessitates forcing a universal symbolical interpretation on mundane data such as names of rivers, mountains, places and persons, and thereby replaces the real and complex meaning of the Vedic text with a simplistic though elaborate *Hineininterpretieren*. Worst of all, the belief that a book has been in existence since millions of years, though it was written in a historical language which only came into existence several thousands of years ago as a dialectal development from Proto-Indo-European, is really little better than the Jain claims about the sizes and lifetimes of the Tirthankaras.

7.8. Dayananda on Jain sectarianism

Swami Dayananda rebukes the Shramanas, particularly the Jain monks, for keeping a haughty distance from others: "The Jains are strictly prohibited to 1) praise a person belonging to another religion or to talk of his good qualities, 2) to salute him, 3) to talk much to him, 4) to talk to him frequently, 5) to bestow upon him food and clothes, 6) to supply odoriferous substances and flowers to enable him to worship his idol. Let the wise consider with what feelings of hatred, malice and hostility the Jainees are actuated in their relations with those who profess a religion different from theirs."[33]

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[32] Dayananda: *Light of Truth*, p.578; similarly, p.577-585.

Similarly: "Again, the Jain teachers teach: 'Just as a ruby, which is embedded in the head of a venomous snake, should not be sought after, even so it behoves the Jainees to shun the company of a non-Jainee, no matter how virtuous and learned he is.' It is clear, therefore, that no sectarians are so much biased, perverse, wrong-headed and ignorant as the Jainees are."[34] Similar quotations to the same effect include: "Let not the Jainees even look at those that are opposed to the Jain religion."[35]

Here, Dayananda definitely has a point. The Shramana sects, consisting of people who had given up all worldly responsibilities and had thereby acquired ample leisure to concentrate on doctrinal matters, were quite literally sectarian. Spending a lot of their time and energy on polemic against rival sects as well as against non-sect beliefs and practices, they produced a polemical literature which has no counterpart in pre-Buddhist Brahmanism. The need, not so much of a sect's founder but of his followers, to set the founder apart from his contemporaries, automatically leads to a somewhat hostile attitude towards other traditions, specifically those closely related. It is part of this same tradition that contemporary Buddhists and Jains go out of their way to magnify the differences with Hinduism.

An aspect of Jain history not considered by Dayananda, is the influence of Islam on the Sthanakvasi branch of Jainism, founded by a Muni who lived at the court of Mohammed Shah Tughlaq 1325-51, and on its Terapanthi offshoot. In imitation of Islam, these communities denounce temple-going and idol-worship, common enough among the Shwetambara mainstream (contrastively also known as Murtipujaka Sangha, "image-worshipping assembly")[36], and from there it is but a step to assuming that the social separatism enjoined in the passages quoted by Dayananda is equally due to Islamic influence; that interpretation has at least been given to me by Hindutva-minded Jains. In my opinion, however, the purity notion intrinsic to Jain tradition (conceived as a need to avoid accumulating Karma) is sufficient as an explanation for this Jain practice of keeping distance from the uninitiated.

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[33] Dayananda: *Light of Truth*, p.547, quoting from the Jain scripture *Vivekasâra*, p.121, without further bibliographical data.

[34] Dayananda: *Light of Truth*, p.549, quoting the Jain scripture *Prakaraṇa Ratnâkara* 2:29.

[35] Dayananda: *Light of Truth* p.549, quoting *Prakaraṇa Ratnâkara* 2:29.

The allegation of haughtiness and keeping distance would of course fit orthodox Brahmins as well as Jain sectarians, but the Arya Samaj cannot be accused of double standards here, i.c. of neglecting to produce a similar anti-Brahmin invective. On the contrary, it can take a certain dubious credit for "hinduizing" the anti-Brahmin rhetoric propagated by Christian missionaries. What may, however, be held against the Arya Samaj, is that it is similarly sectarian itself, sometimes in a more aggressive way than the Jains as per Dayananda's description.

In the early decades of the Samaj's existence, its more zealous activists would disrupt traditional devotions and insult priests, with "pope" as a common taunt for Brahmins. Some would even go into Hindu "idol temples" and relieve themselves right there to show their contempt for idolatry in no uncertain terms.[37] Dayananda's own writing against more traditional forms of Hinduism is very intemperate, full of harsh words and lacking in patience and human sympathy. Sectarianism has made school inside Hindu society.

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[36] See P. Dundas: *The Jains*, p.66.

[37] A testimony of this type of Arya Samaj activism is given by S.R. Goel: *How I Became a Hindu*, p.5.

7.9. Did Hindus demolish Jain temples?

During the Ayodhya conflict, Muslim and secularist polemicists tried to counter the Hindu argument about the thousands of Hindu temples razed by Islamic iconoclasm with the claim that Hindus had likewise destroyed or desecrated Buddhist and Jain temples. While the few cases of alleged Hindu aggression against Buddhism are either of doubtful historicity or easily and credibly explainable from other motives than religious intolerance, there are a few cases of conflict with Jainism which seem more serious. They have formed the topic of a debate between Marxist historian Romila Thapar and Sita Ram Goel.

For a start, in the 12th century, "in Gujarat, Jainism flourished during the reign of Kumarapala, but his successor [i.e. Ajayapala] persecuted the Jainas and destroyed their temples".[38] According to D.C. Ganguly: "The Jain chronicles allege that Ajayapâla was a persecutor of the Jains, that he demolished Jain temples, mercilessly executed the Jain scholar Ramachandra, and killed Ambada, a minister of Kumârapâla, in an encounter."[39]

Here, the alleged crime is related by the victims, not by the alleged aggressors (as is usually the case for Muslim iconoclasm). It is possible that they exaggerated, but I see no reason to believe that they simply invented the story. However, since the Jains had been dominant ("flourishing") in the preceding period, one might suspect a case of retaliation here. We shall see shortly that in South India, what little of Hindu aggression against Jainism occurred was due precisely to earlier oppression by the Jains.

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[38] Romila Thapar: *Cultural Transaction and Early India: Tradition and Patronage*, p.18.

[39] D.C. Ganguly: "Northern India during the eleventh and twelfth centuries", in R.C. Majumdar: *The History and Culture of the Indian People*, vol.5: *Struggle for Empire*, p.78.

Ganguly adds that Jains had opposed Ajayapala's accession to the throne: "After the death of Kumârapâla in AD 1171-72 there was a struggle for the throne between his sister's son Pratâpamalla, who was apparently backed by the Jains, and Ajayapâla, son of Kumârapâla's brother Mahîpâla, who seems to have been supported by the Brâhmanas."[40] Clearly, a political intrigue is involved of which we have not been given the full story. Predictably, Goel comments: "The instance she mentions from Gujarat was only the righting of a wrong which the Jains had committed under Kumârapâla."[41]

Next, there was the attack by the Paramara king Subhatavarman (r. 1193-1210) on Gujarat, in which "a large number of Jain temples in Dabhoi and Cambay" were "plundered" in retaliation of plundering of Hindu temples in Malwa by the Gujaratis during their invasion of Malwa under Jayasimha Siddharaja (d. 1143) who was under great Jain influence. Harbans Mukhia cites this as proof that "many Hindu rulers did the same [as the Muslims] with temples in enemy-territory long before the Muslims had emerged as a political challenge to these kingdoms".[42] However, it is well-known that the Muslims did more than just plunder: even temples where there was nothing to plunder were desecrated and destroyed or converted into mosques in many places, for the Muslims' motive was not merely economic.

The most important and well-known case of "persecution of Jains" is mentioned by Romila Thapar: "The Shaivite saint Jnana Sambandar is attributed with having converted the Pandya ruler from Jainism to Shaivism, whereupon it is said that 8,000 Jainas were impaled by the king."[43] To this, Sita Ram

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[40] D.C. Ganguly: "Northern India during the eleventh and twelfth centuries", in R.C. Majumdar: *The History and Culture of the Indian People*, vol.5: *Struggle for Empire*, p.78.

[41] S.R. Goel: *Hindu Temples*, vol.2 (2nd ed.), p.419-420.

[42] Harbans Mukhia in R. Thapar, ed.: *Communalism and the Writing of Indian History*, p.34.

[43] Romila Thapar: *Cultural Transaction*, p.17.

Goel points out that she omits crucial details: that this king, Arikesari Parankusa Maravarman, is also described as having first persecuted Shaivas, when he himself was a Jain; that Sambandar vanquished the Jainas not in battle but in debate, which was the occasion for the king to convert from Jainism to Shaivism (wagers in which the second or a third party promises to convert if you win the debate are not uncommon in India's religious literature); and that Sambandar had escaped Jain attempts to kill him.[44] This Shaiva-Jaina conflict was clearly not a one-way affair, and as per the very tradition invoked by Prof. Thapar, Jains themselves had been the aggressors.

It is even a matter of debate whether this persecution has occurred at all. Nilakanth Shastri, in his unchallenged *History of South India*, writes about it: "This, however, is little more than an unpleasant legend and cannot be treated as history."[45] Admittedly, this sounds like Percival Spear's statement that Aurangzeb's persecutions are "little more than a hostile legend"[46]: a sweeping denial of a well-attested persecution. However, Mr. Spear's contention is amply disproven by contemporary documents including *firmans* (royal decrees) and eye-witness accounts, and by the archaeological record, e.g. the destruction of the Kashi Vishvanath temple in Varanasi by Aurangzeb is attested by the temple remains incorporated in the Gyanvapi mosque built on its site. Such evidence has not been offered in the case of Jnana Sambandar at all. On the contrary: "Interestingly, the persecution of Jains in the Pandya country finds mention only in Shaiva literature, and is not corroborated by Jain literature of the same or subsequent period."[47]

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[44] S.R. Goel: *Hindu Temples*, vol.2 (2nd ed.), p.420.

[45] Nilakanth Sastri: *History of South India*, p.424.

[46] Percival Spear: *A History of India*, vol.2, p.56.

[47] S.R. Goel: *Hindu Temples*, vol.2 (2nd ed.), p.420.

On the other hand, the historicity of the Jain-Shaiva conflict in general is confirmed by Shaiva references to more cases of Jain aggression, none of which is mentioned by Romila Thapar. Dr. Usha Sivapriya, before duly quoting classical Tamil sources, argues that the literatures posterior to Manikkavasaghar (an ancient Tamil sage, author of *Thiruvasagham*) "had plenty of reference to the nature, torture and terrorism of Jaina missionaries and rulers in Tamil kingdom".[48] It all started with the invasion by Kharavela, king of Kalinga, at the turn of the Christian era: "Kharavela defeated the Tamil kings headed by Pandiyans and captured Madhurai. The Kalinga or Vadugha king enforced Jaina rule in Tamil kingdom. People were forcibly converted at knifepoint, temples were demolished or locked down, devotees were tortured and killed."[49]

And it continued intermittently for centuries under Pandya and Pallava rule: "When the Digambara Jaina missionaries had failed in converting the masses, they tried to torture and kill them. (...) After failing in the attempt of converting Pandiyans the Digambara Jains tried to kill the Pandiyan Kings through various means, by sending a dangerous snake, wild bull and mad elephant."[50]

Dr. Sivapriya links the advent of Jainism in Tamil Nadu with an episode of conquest by non-Tamils. Goel adds: "The persecution of Jains in the Pandya country by some Shaivas had nothing to do with Shaivism as such, but was an expression of a nationalist conflict which I will relate shortly. What I want to point out first is that most of the royal dynasties which ruled in India after the breakdown of the Gupta Empire and before the advent of Islamic invaders, were Shaiva (...). The Jains are known to have flourished everywhere; not a single instance of the Jains being persecuted under any of these dynasties is known. (...) M. Arunachalam, in a monograph published eight years before Professor Thapar delivered the lectures which comprise her pamphlet (...) has proved conclusively, with the help of epigraphic and literary evidence, that the Kalabhara invaders from Karnataka had occupied Tamil Nadu for 300 years (between AD 250 and 550), and that they subscribed to the Digambara sect of Jainism."[51]

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[48] Usha Sivapriya: *True History and Time of Mg̱nikkavg̱saghàr from His Own Works*, p.134.

[49] Usha Sivapriya: *Mânikkavâsaghar*, p.139.

[50] Usha Sivapriya: *Mânikkavâsaghar*, p.137-138.

So, this is where "nationalist" resentment against the conquerors came to coincide with resentment against Jainism: "It so happened that some of the Kalabhara princes were guided by a few narrow-minded Jain ascetics, and inflicted injuries on some Shaiva and Vaishnava saints and places of worship. They also took away the *agrahâras* which Brahmanas had enjoyed in earlier times. And a reaction set in when the Kalabharas were overthrown. The new rulers who rose subscribed to Shaivism. It was then that the Jains were persecuted in some places, and some Jain places of worship were taken over by the Shaivas under the plea that these were Shaiva places in the earlier period."[52]

In such cases, "Professor Thapar does not mention the Jain high-handedness which had preceded. (...) Professor Thapar should have mentioned the persecution of Shaivas practised earlier by the Pandya king who was a Jain to start with, and who later on converted to Shaivism and persecuted the Jains. This is another case of *suppressio veri suggestio falsi* practised very often by her school."[53]

To clinch the issue and confirm that the Pandya incident of persecution of Jains is atypical and disconnected from Hindu doctrines, Goel adds: "But the reaction was confined to the Pandya country. Jainism continued to flourish in northern

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[51] S.R. Goel: *Hindu Temples*, vol.2 (2nd ed.), p.419, with reference to M. Arunachalam: *The Kalabharas in the Pandiya Country and Their Impact on the Life and Letters There*, University of Madras, 1979.

[52] S.R. Goel: *Hindu Temples*, vol.2 (2nd ed.), p.419-420.

[53] S.R. Goel: *Hindu Temples*, vol.2 (2nd ed.), p.419-420.

Tamil Nadu which also had been invaded by the Kalabharas, where also the Shaivas and Vaishnavas had been molested by the Jains, and where also the Shaivas had come to power once again. It is significant that though Buddhists also invite invectives in the same Shaiva literature, no instance of Buddhists being persecuted is recorded. That was because Buddhists had never harmed the Shaivas. It is also significant that the Vaishnavas of Tamil Nadu show no bitterness against the Jains though they had also suffered under Kalabhara rule."[54]

7.10. Jains and Virashaivas

A later offshoot of Shaivism, viz. the Virashaiva or Lingayat sect, also showed its hostility to Jainism repeatedly. Indeed, Prof. Thapar's next piece of evidence is that "inscriptions of the sixteenth century from the Srisailam area of Andhra Pradesh record the pride taken by Veerashaiva chiefs in beheading *shvetambara* Jains".[55] Concerning such cases, she alleges that: "The desire to portray tolerance and non-violence as the eternal values of the Hindu tradition has led to the pushing aside of such evidence."[56]

Now, the Veerashaivas were an anti-caste and anti-Brahminical sect. As these are considered good qualities, secularists have tried to link them to the influence of Muslim missionaries ("bringing the message of equality and brotherhood"), who were indeed very active on India's west coast, where and when the Veerashaiva doctrine was developed. If we assume there was indeed Muslim influence on the Veerashaiva sect, the secularists should acknowledge that the Veerashaivas' occasional acts of intolerance may equally be due to the influence of Islam. At any rate "Brahminism" cannot be held guilty of any misdeeds committed by this anti-Brahminical sect.

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[54] S.R. Goel: *Hindu Temples*, vol.2 (2nd ed.), p.420.

[55] Romila Thapar: *Cultural Transaction*, p.18, with reference to P.B. Desai: *Jainism in South India.*

[56] Romila Thapar: *Cultural Transaction and Early India: Tradition and Patronage*, p.18. Note here that Veerashaivism is assumed to be a part of Hindu tradition, as it obviously should be. Yet, when its initial anti-caste tendency is praised, it is often presented as an anti-Hindu or at least non-Hindu "reaction of the non-Aryan natives restoring their pre-Aryan deity Shiva" and the like.

But it seems well-established that the Lingayats did give the Jains a hard time on several occasions. Prof. Thapar's continues: "The Jaina temples of Karnataka went through a traumatic experience at the hands of the Lingayats or Virashaivas in the early second millennium AD."[57] After a time of peaceful co-existence, which Romila Thapar acknowledges, "one of the temples was converted into a Shaiva temple. At Huli, the temple of the five Jinas was converted into a *panchalingeshwara* Shaivite temple, the five lingas replacing the five Jinas in the sancta. Some other Jaina temples met the same fate."[58]

Could this be a case of a peaceful hand-over? Maybe the community itself had converted and consequently decided to convert its temple as well? After all, the temples were not destroyed. No, because: "An inscription at Ablur in Dharwar eulogizes attacks on Jaina temples as retaliation for Jaina opposition to Shaivite worship."[59]

It may be remarked at the outset that the element of *retaliation* sets this story apart from Christian or Islamic iconoclasm, which did not require in any way that some form of aggression had first been committed by the other party. When Saint Boniface, the Christian missionary to the Frisians and Saxons, cut down the sacred trees of the Frisians, he was not taking revenge for any wrong committed by them against him: he was unilaterally destroying cultic objects of what he believed to be a false religion (in glorification of his chopping down sacred trees, he is iconographically depicted with an axe in his hand). When Ghaznavi invaded India and took great strategic risks to venture as far as Prabhas Patan and destroy the famous Somnath temple there, he was not retaliating but unilaterally initiating an aggression.

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[57] Romila Thapar: *Cultural Transaction*, p.17; with reference to P.B. Desai: *Jainism in South India*, p.82-83, p.401-402.

[58] Romila Thapar: *Cultural Transaction*, p.17.

[59] Romila Thapar: *Cultural Transaction*, p.18.

In this case, however, the inscription cited by Prof. Thapar herself justifies the unspecified "attacks" on Jain temples as an act of retaliation. This proves that either the Jains had indeed been the first aggressors, or if they were not, that the Shaivas felt the need to claim this: otherwise, attacking someone else's temple didn't feel right to them. Christian and Islamic iconoclasts had no such scruples. No Hindu revivalist historian could have mustered better evidence for the radical difference between the alleged cases of intolerance by Hindus and the Islamic and Christian religious persecutions, than this brief information given in passing by Romila Thapar.

There is a second aspect to this inscriptional evidence. Here again, Mr. Goel accuses Prof. Thapar of distorting evidence by means of selective quoting. The inscription of which she summarizes a selected part, says first of all that the dispute arose because the Jains tried to prevent a Shaiva from worshipping his own idol.[60] It further relates that the Jains also promised to throw out Jina and worship Shiva if the Shiva devotee performed a miracle, but when the miracle was produced, they did not fulfil their promise. In the ensuing quarrel, the Jina idol was broken by the Shaivas. The most significant element is that the Jain king Bijjala decided in favour of the Shaivas when the matter was brought before him. He dismissed the Jains and showered favours on the Shaivas.

Again, in this story the conflict is not a one-way affair at all. We need not accept the story at face value, as it is one of those sectarian miracle stories (with the message: "My saint is holier than thy saint") which abound in the traditions surrounding most places of pilgrimage, be they Christian, Sufi, or Hindu. Goel cites the testimony of Dr. Fleet, who has edited and translated this inscription along with four others found at the same place. He gives summaries of two Lingayat Puranas and the Jain *Bijjalacharitra*, and observes that the story in this inscription finds no support in the literary traditions of the two sects, and that Bijjala's own inscription dated 1162 AD discovered at Managoli also does not support the story either.[61] The fact that the inscription under consideration does not bear a date or a definite reference to the reign of a king, does not help its credibility either. And do authentic inscriptions deal in miracles?

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[60] S.R. Goel: *Hindu Temples*, vol.2 (2nd ed.), p.413, with reference to the inscription itself, reproduced in *Epigraphica Indica*, vol.3, p.255.

I do not think that historians working with conflicting testimonies are in a position to make apodictic statements and definitive conclusions, so I will not completely dismiss this inscription as fantasy. It is possible that the Jainas had indeed fallen on hard times, and I do not dispose of material that would refute prof. Thapar's contention that "in the fourteenth century the harassment of Jainas was so acute that they had to appeal for protection to the ruling power at Vijayanagar".[62] But note that the ruling power at Vijayanagar, whose protection the Jains sought, was of course Hindu. Clearly, the Jains' experience with Hindus was such that they expected Hindu rulers to protect religious freedom and pluralism.

Not much is left of the allegation of "Hindu persecution of Jains", and in that light, Goel's conclusion must be considered relatively modest: "It is nobody's case that there was never any conflict between the sects and sub-sects of Sanatana Dharma. Some instances of persecution were indeed there. Our plea is that they should be seen in a proper perspective, and not exaggerated in order to whitewash or counterbalance the record of Islamic intolerance. Firstly, the instances are few and far between when compared to those listed in Muslim annals. Secondly, those instances are spread over several millennia (...) Thirdly, none of those instances were inspired by a theology (...) Fourthly, Jains were not always the victims of persecution; they were persecutors as well once in a while. Lastly, no king or commander or saint who showed intolerance has been a Hindu hero, while Islam has hailed as heroes only those characters who excelled in intolerance."[63]

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[61] *Epigraphica Indica*, vol.5, p.9-23.

[62] Romila Thapar: *Cultural Transaction*, p.18.

And even if all the claims of a Hindu persecution of Jains had been true, they would still not prove the non-Hindu character of Jainism. From the history of Christianity, Islam and Communism, great persecutors of outsiders to their own doctrines, we know numerous instances where the worst invective and the choicest tortures were reserved for alleged heretics within their own fold.

7.11. Conclusion

At the institutional level, the Hindutva opposition to the recognition of Jainism as a separate non-Hindu religion is largely a losing battle. Religious separatism has its own dynamic, feeding egos who feel more important as leaders of a religion in its own right rather than a mere sect within a larger tradition. Anti-Hindu separatists are also assured of the support of secularist bureaucracies such as the Minorities' Commission, of the secularist media and of all the non-Hindu religious lobbies. All of these are eager to fragment and weaken Hindu society.

Yet, at the sociological level, the Jain community is entirely part of Hindu society, caste and all. Even more importantly, a great many Jains (certainly a larger portion of the community than in the case of Sikhism or Buddhism) come forward themselves to affirm their Hinduness. Historically, Jainism has always enjoyed a place under the umbrella of Hindu pluralism, suffering clashes with southern Shaivism only a few times when its own sectarianism had provoked the conflict.

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[63] S.R. Goel: *Hindu Temples*, vol.2 (2nd ed.), p.422. An evaluation of this statement presupposes some familiarity with the Hindu critique of Islam, which is discussed in K. Elst: *Decolonizing the Hindu Mind*, p.310 ff.

Deciding the question whether Jainism is a sect of Hinduism requires a proper definition of Hinduism. The answer varies with that definition. If Hinduism means veneration of the Vedas, then Jainism may formally be taken to be outside the Hindu fold, though it remains closely akin to Hindu schools of philosophy springing from Hindu thought (particularly Nyaya-Vaisheshika). If Hinduism implies theism, then Jainism should definitely be counted out; but a theistic definition of Hinduism is highly questionable, eventhough after centuries of theistic devotionalism, many unsophisticated Hindus would accept it.

On the other hand, if Hinduism means the actually observed variety of religious expressions among non-Muslims and non-Christians in India, then there is nothing in Jainism that would make it so radically different as to fall outside this spectrum. If Hinduism means all traditions native to India (as per Savarkar and the original Muslim usage), then obviously Jainism is a Hindu tradition.

8. Are Sikhs Hindus?

8.1. The problem of Sikh identity

In most of the contemporary literature, Sikhism is treated as a separate religion. The questioning of this separateness by Hindus is usually only mentioned in scornful tones, as a sign of "Hindu fundamentalist" sympathies. Most non-specialist Western sources implicitly support Sikh separatism, at least the religious, non-territorial variety. Thus, the cover story on India in the non-political American monthly *National Geographic* carries a picture of a typical-looking Sikh before the Hari Mandir in Amritsar, with the caption: "The Golden Temple in Amritsar serves as the spiritual centre for the world's 20 million Sikhs. 'From Hindus and Muslims have I broken free', said Arjan Dev Ji, the fifth Sikh guru, in the 1590s. The faith holds all people equal in the eyes of God."[1] Of these three sentences, two are statements of support to Sikh separatism, and both are open to criticism.

The last sentence highlights equality, obviously contrasting it with the "Hindu" caste system. However, the now-popular claim that Sikhism is caste-free and that this sets it apart from Hinduism (on the assumption that caste is intrinsic to Hinduism), is simply untrue. Every Hindu knows that Sikhs have not ceased practising caste, but for an authoritative refutation, we may turn to a historian who scrutinized the record of Sikhism: "The acknowledgement of caste identities was presumably acceptable to the Gurus, for (...) the Gurus themselves married their own children according to traditional caste prescriptions. The anti-caste thrust of the Gurus' teachings must be seen as a doctrine which referred to spiritual deliverance and (...) a firm rejection of injustice or hurtful discrimination based on caste status. What is not implied is a total obliteration of caste identity."[2]

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[1] *National Geographic*, May 1997, p.54.

Till today, Sikhs marry with Hindus of the same caste, while they still avoid marriage with Sikhs of different castes. Likewise, Sikh politics is largely divided along caste lines, e.g. the Akali movement is one of Jat Sikhs, shunned by low-caste Sikhs (who are called Mazhabi Sikhs, that is, Sikhs by religion alone, e.g. former Congress minister Buta Singh) and by the higher Khatri and Arora castes to which the Gurus belonged.

The second sentence in the *National Geographic* caption, Guru Arjun's statement, is superficially a crystal-clear expression of Sikh separateness.[3] Yet, it is not as straightforward as separatists might wish. No Sikh Guru was ever a Muslim, ergo the half-sentence: "Of Muslims have I broken free", does not mean that he abandoned Islam. Therefore, the other half need not be construed as a repudiation of Hinduism either. Rather, it may be read as repudiating the whole "identity" business including the division of mankind into Hindu and Muslim categories, on the Upanishadic ground that the Self is beyond these superficial trappings (the Self being *neti neti*, "not this, not that")—but that is a typically Hindu and decidedly un-Islamic position. To the Quran, group identity

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[2] W.H. McLeod: *Who is a Sikh?*, p.21. The pan-Sikh last names *Singh*, "lion", and *Kaur*, "princess", do not replace but merely conceal the caste titles (Khattri, Arora etc.) which are the real last names. It is a recent development that Singhs have replaced their caste surnames with the names of their villages, e.g. Badal, Barnala, etc.

[3] The verse, from the Guru Granth *Bhairav*, is quoted in extenso by Gurdarshan Singh Dhillon: "Perspective on Sikh Identity", *Indian Express*, 21-5-1991, and in Khushwant Singh: *History of the Sikhs*, vol.1, p.62. A similar verse was included by Guru Arjun in the Granth (54:5) but originally written by Kabir: "I am neither Hindu nor Muslim; body and life belong to Allah-Rama", see Duncan Greenlees: *The Gospel of the Guru Granth Sahib*, p.211.

(being a member of the Muslim *ummah* or not) is everything, is laden with far-reaching consequences including an eternity in heaven or in hell. To Hindu society, it is also undeniably important; but to Hindu spirituality, it is not. Likewise, another verse of the same poem, "I will not pray to idols nor say the Muslim prayer", is more anti-Islamic than anti-Hindu: it rejects a duty binding every single Muslim (prayer) and a practice common among Hindus (idol-worship) but by no means obligatory.

There is enough of a *prima facie* case that Sikhism is a Hindu sect pure and simple. And effectively, some Sikhs do claim that they are Hindus.[4] Of course, the Hindutva movement holds the same view: the Sikhs are just one of the sects constituting the Hindu Commonwealth. Or no, not "just" one: they are the "sword-arm" of Hinduism. The Sikh Gurus Tegh Bahadur, beheaded by Aurangzeb in 1675 for refusing to convert, and his son Govind Singh, who founded the military Khalsa order and whose four sons were killed by the Moghul troops, are very popular in Hindutva glorifications of "national heroes".[5] Their pictures are routinely displayed at functions of the RSS and its affiliates, and their holidays celebrated, e.g.: "Over 650 branches of Bharat Vikas Parishad observe Guru Tegh Bahadur Martyrdom Day".[6]

The Hindu identity of the Sikhs which Veer Savarkar and Guru Golwalkar simply assumed, Ram Swarup and Arun Shourie have also tried to demonstrate, and we will consider their argument here, juxtaposed with some observations by other Hindu Revivalists and with the arguments given by the famous Sikh author Khushwant Singh, who sometimes defends and sometimes dismisses the claims of Sikh separateness.

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[4] E.g.: Rajendra Singh Nirala: *Ham Hindû Hain* (Hindi, itself a translation from the Panjabi original: "We are Hindus"), 1989; *Ham Hindû Kyon* ("Why we are Hindus"), 1990, both published by Voice of India. These books were written at the height of Khalistani terrorism and publishing them was a matter of great personal courage.

[5] Vide e.g. the RSS publication by Ram Prakash: *Tegh Bahadur*.

[6] Title in *Organiser*, 21-12-1997. *Bhârat Vikâs Parishad*: "Indian Development Council", yet another RSS front.

8.2. Are Sikhs Muslims?

If we accept the historical definition of *"Hindu"* given by the Muslims, there is simply no doubt about it: all Sikhs fall under the heading "Indian Pagans", for they are neither Muslims nor Christians, Jews or Parsis. So, Sikhs are Hindus. Unless...

Unless Sikhs are some kind of Muslims. Ram Swarup starts his survey of the genesis of Sikh separatism with the discovery that T.P. Hughes' *Dictionary of Islam*, written in the British-Indian colonial context, devotes the third-longest of its articles (after *Muhammad* and *Qur'ân*) to the lemma *Sikhism*. According to Ram Swarup, "it must be a strange sect of Islam where the word 'Mohammed' does not occur even once in the writings of its founder, Nanak."[7] Nor did later Gurus include the praise of Mohammed in the Guru Granth.

Hughes himself admits at the outset that the readers may be surprised to find Sikhism treated as a sect of Islam, but promises to show that "the religion of Nanak was really intended as a compromise between Hinduism and Muhammadanism, if it may not even be spoken of as the religion of a Muhammadan sect"[8]. His endeavour is significant for two trends affecting the Sikh position in India's religious spectrum: Sikh rapprochement with Islam for the sake of distinguishing itself from Hinduism, and the British colonial policy (which also employed scholars) of isolating the Sikh community and forging it into a privileged collaborating enclave in native society.

To start with the first point, it is a general rule that any enumeration of the distinctive elements of Sikhism by proponents of Sikh separateness exclusively mentions points which distinguish it from Hinduism and bring it closer to Islam. Thus, Khushwant Singh names the crucial difference: "The revolt of Sikhism was not against Hinduism but against its Brahminical form. It was based on two things: the concept of God as unity, a God who was *nirankâr* (formless). Therefore, Sikhism rejected the worship of idols. It also rejected the caste system. It was, as the cliché goes, an acceptance of the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man."[9]

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[7] Ram Swarup: *Hindu-Sikh Relationship*, p.12.

[8] T.P. Hughes: *Dictionary of Islam*, p.583.

The said cliché is actually a self-formulation of Protestant Christianity; in India, it was also enunciated by Keshub Chunder Sen of the Brahmo Samaj, but there is nothing particularly Sikh about it.[10] Khushwant Singh also calls Sikhism "prophet-based" and "monotheistic", both Biblical-Islamic notions but now central items in Sikh separatist discourse.[11]

The question may be asked whether the alleged non-polytheism of Guru Nanak really is the same thing as the Biblical-Quranic worship of a "jealous God". Sri Aurobindo, for one, insisted on the radically different spirit in Sikhism as compared with Islam: "Those ways of Indian cult which most resemble a popular form of Theism, are still something more; for they do not exclude, but admit the many aspects of God. (...) The later religious forms which most felt the impress of the Islamic idea, like Nanak's worship of the timeless One, *Akâla*, and the reforming creeds of today, born under the influence of the West, yet draw away from the limitations of western or Semitic monotheism. Irresistibly they turn from these infantile conceptions towards the fathomless truth of Vedanta."[12] Just as Christians in debate with Islam affirm: the fact that both your God and my God are described as single and unique, does not imply that they are the same.[13]

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[9] K. Singh: *Many Faces*, p.4.

[10] I forego discussion of the apparent contradiction between Gods's "fatherhood" (a specific god-form) and His "formlessness".

[11] E.g.: "Monotheism (...) culminated in Guru Nanak's religious thought", according to Shashi Bala: *The Concept of Monotheism*, p.vii. An explicit claim that Guru Nanak was a prophet receiving divine revelations is made in D. Greenlees: *Gospel of Guru Granth Sahib*, p.clxxi ff.

The most striking point, however, is that none of the elements of Sikh doctrine mentioned by Khushwant Singh sets Sikhism apart from Islam; he could have mentioned the Sikh attachment to the taboo on cow-slaughter, but significantly overlooks it. In militant Sikhism, we find a whole list of concepts and institutions remoulded or newly created in the image of Islamic (or Christian) counterparts, e.g. *guru* has become a synonym for *rasûl*, *hukumnâma* for *fatwa*, *dharmyuddh* for *jihâd*, *pîrî-mîrî* for *khilâfat.*[14] And of course *Khâlistân* (from Arabic *khalîs*, "unmixed") is the Sikh separatist equivalent for *Pâkistân*, both meaning "land of the pure".

In order to bolster their separateness from Hinduism, Sikh separatists magnify the Islamic element in Sikhism. An element of this tendency is the replacement of Sanskrit-based terms with Persian terms, e.g. the *Hari Mandir*, "Vishnu temple", in Amritsar is preferably called *Darbâr Sâhib*,

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[12] Sri Aurobindo: *Foundations of Indian Culture*, p.135.

[13] See e.g. Dr. Robert Morey: *The Islamic Invasion*, esp. Ch.3: "The God of Islam: Allah and the God of the Bible", e.g. p.65: "Many Westerners assume that Allah is just another name for God. This is due to their ignorance of the difference between the Allah of the Quran and the God of the Bible [and to] the present popularity of religious relativism".

[14] *Rasûl*: "prophet". *Pîrî-mîrî*, from Persian *pîr*, Sufi saint, and Arabic *(a)mîr*, "commander", means "spiritual-cum-worldly authority", proclaimed as his prerogative by Guru Hargovind in ca. 1630 (or so modern Sikh authors claim), and symbolized by the two swords in the Sikh emblem (as Islam described the Khalifas as *Amir-ul-mominin* and never as a *pîr*, it never spawned anything like the two-sword symbol which adorned the pope two-three contries earlier). *Hukumnâma*, "ordering letter", is a written judgment by the *Akâl Takht*, the "timeless throne", the highest collective authority of the Sikh community. *Dharm-yuddh*, "religious war", originally not in the sense of *jihâd*, "war against the unbelievers", but in the sense of: warfare conducted within the limits of a chivalrous code of honour.

"venerable court session (of the Timeless one)".[15] Another expression of this tendency is the induction of Muslim divines into Sikh history, e.g. the by now widespread story that the foundation stone of the Hari Mandir was laid by the Sufi *pîr* Mian Mir. After this story was repeated again and again in his weekly column by Khushwant Singh, Sita Ram Goel wrote a detailed survey of the oldest and modernst sources pertaining to the construction of the Hari Mandir, found no trace of Mian Mir there, and concluded: "I request you to (...) stop propping up a blatant forgery simply because it has become popular and is being patronised by those who control the neo-Sikh establishment."[16] Khushwant Singh never mentioned Mian Mir again.

Goel's general position is that modern Sikh self-historiography is full of concoction, starting with insertions and changes in 19th-century editions of older texts, all of it in unsubtle appropriation of the latest ideological fashions. He argues that Sikh history was magnified both by Anglo-secularist authors (Sikhism as a "proto-secular" religion of "Hindu-Muslim synthesis" free of "Brahminical superstition") and by Hindu nationalists (Sikhism as the "sword-arm of Hinduism") simply because the Sikhs were a privileged and prosperous community. As often, the present power equation determines the relative importance of individuals and groups in the history books.[17] In Goel's view, Guru Nanak was by no means greater than other Sants like Garibdas (to whose *panth* Goel's own family belonged), he only has the benefit of an assertive constituency of followers in the present.

Likewise, Rajendra Singh, a Sikh anti-separatist author and regular contributor to the RSS weekly *Panchjanya*, claims that even (not to say *especially*) the key moments of Sikh history are often concoctions. Thus, the founding of the martial Khalsa order by Guru Govind Singh in 1699, with the beard as part of its dress code, is put in doubt by a post-1699 painting of a clean-shaven Govind Singh.[18] He also points out that many stories about the lives of the Gurus are obvious calks on Puranic or Islamic stories.

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[15] In Sikh terminology, the Arabic-derived term *sâhib*, "companion [of the Prophet]", hence an honorific for white people (formerly Turks, then Europeans), serves as a general honorific (like Hindi *shrî* or *-jî*), e.g. *Gurû Granth Sâhib, Anandpûr Sâhib.*

[16] S.R. Goel: "Only the truth is sacred", *Sunday Observer*, 2-4-1995.

[17] Interview, Delhi, December 1997.

Neither Goel nor Rajendra Singh has so far worked out these arguments in writing, so I will not pursue this line of debate here. Yet, my impression from the available literature is that a close verification of the now-popular version of Sikh history is indeed called for.

Thus, Khushwant Singh relates about the martyrdom of the fifth Guru, Arjun Dev: "Among his tormentors was a Hindu banker whose daughter's hand Arjun had refused to accept for his son."[19] In the main text, he relates this story as a fact, but in footnote, he adds that "there is nothing contemporary on record to indicate that the Hindu banker, Chandu Shah, was in any way personally vindictive towards the captive Guru", then justifies the inclusion of the story with reference to colonial historian Max Arthur Macauliffe.[20] And that is one case where he explicitates the conflict between the assurance given by his most important secondary source (Macauliffe) and the silence of the "contemporary records" consulted by himself; in numerous cases, however, he follows Macauliffe without conveying what the original record has to say.

Most things in Sikhism can be traced either to Hindu origins or to borrowings from Islam. But for centuries, one thing which put the Sikhs firmly in the Hindu camp was the continuous hostility with the Islamic Empire of the Moghuls and with the Muslim Afghans. After Partition, there were practically no Muslims left in East Panjab, and the contrast with Hinduism could now receive the full emphasis for the first time. In that context, separatist Sikhs resorted to highlighting existing or introducing new elements borrowed from Islam. It is typical that in his overview of the elements which make up Sikh identity, Khushwant Singh overlooks specific Sikh commandments which set Sikhism apart from Islam, e.g. the prohibition on marrying Muslim women and on eating *halâl* meat.[21] In his case, I have no reason to surmise any bad faith: if he conveys this politically sanitized reading of Sikh identity, it is because that happens to be the received wisdom now.[22]

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[18] Rajendra Singh (not to be confused with RSS supremo Prof. Rajendra Singh), interview, Delhi, November 1993; relaying a finding of his mentor, Sikh author Rajendra Singh Nirala.

[19] Khushwant Singh: *History of the Sikhs*, vol.1, p.60.

[20] Khushwant Singh: *History of the Sikhs*, vol.1, p.60-61, n.29, referring to M.A. Macauliffe: *The Sikh Religion* (Oxford 1909), vol.3, p.72-75 and p.89-90. As we shall see below, Ch.8.3, Macauliffe's *bona fides* has been questioned. At any rate, the near-contemporary accounts of Arjun Dev's martyrdom, including Jahangir's autobiography (which refers to the Guru as a Hindu), conflict with the now-approved version, vide Louis E. Fenech: "Martyrdom and the Sikh Tradition", *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 1997/4, p.623-642.

To the extent that Sikhism leans towards Islam, it does undeniably set itself apart from Hinduism. The anti-separatist argument will therefore necessarily consist in branding the Islamic elements in Sikhism as late and disingenuous borrowings, or as mere externalities not affecting the essentially Hindu core of Sikhism. They should at any rate be viewed in their historical context: by Guru Nanak's time, Panjab had been under Muslim rule for five centuries, and a number of Muslim customs had passed into common use among Hindus, as lamented by Nanak himself. Likewise, much Persian and Muslim terminology seeped into the language of Panjabi Hindus.

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[21] *Halâl*, in the case of meat, means that the animal was slaughtered according to ritual prescriptions borrowed from Judaism (the term is roughly equivalent to Hebrew *kosher*), esp. in such a way that the blood drips out as completely as possible.

[22] Apart from having read a considerable part of Khushwant Singh's work, I have also met him in informal circumstances (on the airplane, ca. February 1993), and I was struck by his capacity to take a laugh at himself, a rare quality among contemporary intellectuals, particularly those who have made it to the top. A typical example of standard neo-Sikh historiography is Gurmit Singh: *History of the Sikh Struggles.*

8.3. Hinduism as a boa constrictor

Ram Swarup relates how the British had been disappointed with the conclusions of the first scholar who investigated and translated Sikh Scriptures, the German Indologist and missionary Dr. E. Trumpp, who had found Guru Nanak a "thorough Hindu" and his religion "a Pantheism derived directly from Hindu sources".[23] This was not long after the 1857 Mutiny, when the Sikhs had fought on the British side, and the British were systematically turning the Sikhs into one of the privileged enclaves in native society with whose help they wanted to make governing India easier for themselves.

So, according to Ram Swarup, other scholars were put to work to rewrite Sikh history in the sense desired by the British: "Max Arthur Macauliffe, a highly placed British administrator (...) told the Sikhs that Hinduism was like a 'boa constrictor of the Indian forest' which 'winds its opponent and finally causes it to disappear in its capacious interior'. The Sikhs 'may go that way', he warned. He was pained to see that the Sikhs regarded themselves as Hindus which was 'in direct opposition to the teachings of the Gurus'. (...) The influence of scholarship is silent, subtle and long-range. Macauliffe and others provided categories which became the thought-equipment of subsequent Sikh intellectuals."[24]

The "boa constrictor" account is repeated by Khushwant Singh, who is very attached to "Sikh separate identity which we are trying to, and perhaps will go on trying to maintain".[25]

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[23] Quoted from E. Trumpp: *Translation of the Adi Granth*, p.ci, in T.P. Hughes: *Dictionary of Islam*, p.583, and in Ram Swarup: *Hindu-Sikh Relationship*, p.11.

[24] Ram Swarup: *Hindu-Sikh Relationship*, p.12-13. Indeed, "Macauliffe's works (...) were reissued in the sixties. More recent Sikh scholars wrote histories of the Sikhs which were variations on the same theme." (*op.cit.*, p.19)

[25] K. Singh: *Many Faces*, p.5.

He is worried by Hindu open-mindedness: "Hinduism has this enormous capacity of taking everything in its embrace: you can be an idol worshipper, you can be an idol breaker; you can believe in one god, you can believe in a thousand gods; you can have a caste system, you can deny the caste system; you can be an agnostic, atheist, or whatever else you like, and remain a Hindu. What can you do about it? It is this power of absorption of Hinduism, that it is even willing to recognize Prophet Mohammed as an Avatar of Vishnu, that poses the real challenge to other religions."[26] The statement contains exaggerations (idol breaker, Mohammed as avatar?!)[27], but we get the message: Hinduism's accommodation of different spiritual approaches is a problem for separatists.

This is yet another instance of how Hindus are "damned if they do, damned if they don't": had they been intolerant, this would of course be held against them, but even when they are found to be tolerant and accommodating, it is still interpreted as an evil design. When Hinduism integrates new elements, it is not proof of broad-mindedness, but of a strategy of swallowing the minorities.[28] As Arun Shourie remarks, after describing some examples of how Hindu tradition has integrated "Dravidian" and "Aryan" elements: "Why is it that (...) for our columnists and our communists that decision is yet another instance of the devious devices by which Hinduism has been 'swallowing up' other traditions?"[29]

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[26] K. Singh: *Many Faces*, p.4.

[27] Mohammed is equated with Vishnu's tenth incarnation Kalki in the *Khojâ Vrittânta* scripture of the Ismaili Khojas in Gujarat (M.A. Jinnah's community), a kind of inculturation tactic to woo Gujarati Banias into Islam. However, the doctrine of incarnation (*avatârvâd*) is deeply offensive to Islam, which sees *shirk*, "association (of other beings with God)" as its worst enemy. Classically, *shirk* has the general sense of "polytheism", but originally it meant very specifically the "association" of a freshly deceded prominent human individual with a deity (parallel to what the Greeks called *apotheosis*), the way Krishna got "associated" with Vishnu (i.e. posthumously recognized as partaking of the essence of that deity); see, for examples of the *shirk* of Ugaritic kings with god *Ilu* (Hebrew *El/Eloha*, Arabic *al-Ilâh,= Allâh*), J.C. De Moor: *The Rise of Yahwism*, p.330-331.

[28] For partisan studies criticizing Hindu "inclusivism" as a manifestation of their intolerance, vide e.g. W. Halbfass: *India and Europe*, Ch.22, or G. Oberhammer, ed.: *Inklusivismus, eine indische Denkform.*

In the case of Sikhism, at any rate, the boa metaphor does not really fit the case: Sikhism has sprung from Hinduism, and it is not as if the two were strangers who met one day and then the one decided to swallow up the other. But it may be said that in the 19th century, Hinduism was *reabsorbing* Sikhism, and that it may yet complete this process in the future.

8.4. Sikhs were Hindus

That the Sikhs "regarded themselves as Hindus" is confirmed by Khushwant Singh, who concedes that three centuries of Sikh history after Nanak, including the creation of the Khalsa as a Sikh martial vanguard by Guru Govind Singh, were not enough to make Sikhism into a separate religion: "However, what is worthwhile to bear in mind is that, despite these innovations, this new community, the Khalsa Panth, remained an integral part of the Hindu social and religious system. It is significant that when Tegh Bahadur was summoned to Delhi, he went as a representative of the Hindus. He was executed in the year 1675. His son who succeeded him as guru later described his father's martyrdom as in the cause of the Hindu faith, 'to preserve their caste marks and their sacred thread did he perform the supreme sacrifice'. The guru himself looked upon his community as an integral part of the Hindu social system."[30]

Tegh Bahadur's martyrdom is usually interpreted as an act of self-sacrifice for the sake of the Kashmiri Pandits threatened with forced conversion. As such, it is a classic Hindutva proof of the Hinduness of Sikhism, though it is also a classic neo-Sikh proof of the "secularism" of Sikhism ("showing concern even for people of a different religion, viz. Hinduism").[31] However, this whole debate may well rest upon a simple misunderstanding.

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[29] A. Shourie: *Secular Agenda*, p.16-17.

[30] Khushwant Singh: *Many Faces*, p.6.

In most Indo-Aryan languages, the oft-used honorific mode of the singular is expressed by the same pronoun as the plural (e.g. Hindi *unkâ*, "his" or "their", as opposed to the non-honorific singular *uskâ*), and vice-versa; by contrast, the singular form only indicates a singular subject. The phrase commonly translated as "the Lord preserved *their* tilak and sacred thread" (*tilak-janjû râkhâ Prabh tâ-kâ*), referring to unnamed outsiders assumed to be the Kashmiri Pandits, literally means that He "preserved *his* tilak and sacred thread", meaning Tegh Bahadur's; it is already unusual poetic liberty to render "*their* tilak and sacred thread" this way, and even if that were intended, there is still no mention of the Kashmiri Pandits in the story.[32] This is confirmed by one of the following lines in Govind's poem about his father's martyrdom: "He suffered martyrdom for the sake of *his* faith."[33] In any case, the story of forced massed conversions in Kashmir by the Moghul emperor Aurangzeb is not supported by the detailed record of his reign by Muslim chronicles who narrate many accounts of his biogorty.

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[31] V.P. Bhatia ("Secularisation of a martyrdom", *Organiser*, 11-1-1998) takes offence at the *Times of India*'s claim (11-11-1997) that Tegh Bahadur "died for other people's rights", thus epitomizing "empathy for fellow human beings, cutting across communal, religious and political barriers". He objects to the "misleading secularist sting", viz. the suggestion that Kashmiri Pandits and Sikhs belong to two distinct religions.

[32] That the Kahmiri Pandits are not mentioned in the contemporaneous accounts is confirmed by Khushwant Singh's translation of the whole poem (*History of the Sikhs*, vol.1, p.74-75, from Govind Singh's *Bachitar Nâṭak*); and tentatively also by Louis E. Fenech: "Martyrdom and the Sikh Tradition", *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 1997/4, p.623-642. The Kashmiri Pandits may have been brought into the account because the history of mass forced conversion in Kashmir was well-known, even proverbial. The Pandits, or at least some of them, escaped by bravery, compromise, bribery, dissimulation or emigration (hence the presence of the Saraswat Brahmin community in the Konkan region), but all other communities in Kashmir were islamized; see e.g. Narender Sehgal: *Converted Kashmir*, p.107-177. However, this forced mass conversion took place under Sikander Butshikan, centuries before Aurangzeb; I am not aware of any original accounts of such a policy concerning the Pandits under Aurangzeb, whose known persecutions may have been projected onto the Kashmiri situation and conflated with Sikander Butshikan's.

Though Govind Singh is considered as the founder of the Khalsa order (1699) who "gave his Sikhs an outward form distinct from the Hindus"[34], he too did things which Sikh separatists would dismiss as "brahminical". As Khushwant Singh notes, "Gobind selected five of the most scholarly of his disciples and sent them to Benares to learn Sanskrit and the Hindu religious texts, to be better able to interpret the writings of the gurus, which were full of allusions to Hindu mythology and philosophy."[35] Arun Shourie quotes Govind Singh as declaring: "Let the path of the pure [*khâlsâ panth*] prevail all over the world, let the Hindu dharma dawn and all delusion disappear. (...) May I spread dharma and prestige of the Veda in the world and erase from it the sin of cow-slaughter."[36]

Khushwant Singh notes with a certain disappointment that even when the Sikhs carved out a state for themselves, they did not separate from Hinduism: "The Sikhs triumphed and we had Ranjit Singh. You may feel that here at long last we had a Sikh monarch, and the Khalsa would come into their own. Nothing of the sort happened. (...) Instead of taking Sikhism in its pristine form, he accepted Hinduism in its brahminical form. He paid homage to Brahmins. He made cow-killing a capital offence"[37]

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[33] Quoted in Khushwant Singh: *History of the Sikhs*,.vol.1, p.75.

[34] Khushwant Singh and Kuldip Nayar: *Tragedy of Punjab*, p.20-21, quoted by V.P. Bhatia: "Secularisation of a Martyrdom", *Organiser*, 11-1-1998. Bhatia merely quotes it for the sake of contrast, to highlight the Hindu commitment which even these two prominent secularists concede to Govind Singh: "Guru Govind Singh (...) sought inspiration from the deeds of martial Hindu deities like goddesses Chandi, Sri and Bhagwati. (...) the dividing line between Hindus and Sikhs remained extremely thin. (...) Many Hindu families brought up one of their sons as a kesadhari Sikh and Hindus and Sikhs in urban areas continued to give their children in marriage to each other." *Kesadhârî*: "one who keeps his hair", a Khalsa Sikh.

[35] Khushwant Singh: *History of the Sikhs*, vol.1, p.80.

[36] A. Shourie: *Secular Agenda*, p.11.

Further, he donated three times more gold to the newly built makeshift Vishvanath temple in Varanasi than to the Hari Mandir in Amritsar. He also threatened the Amirs of Sindh with an invasion if they didn't stop persecuting the Hindus. Even more embarrassing for those who propagate the progressive non-Hindu image of Sikhism: one of the last and greatest royal self-immolations of widows ever performed in India took place in 1839 when Ranjit Singh was accompanied on his funeral pyre by four of his wives and seven maids and concubines.[38]

By any standard, Ranjit Singh was a Hindu ruler: "He worshipped as much in Hindu temples as he did in gurudwaras. When he was sick and about to die, he gave away cows for charity. What did he do with the diamond *Koh-i-noor*? He did not want to give it to the Darbar Sahib at Amritsar which he built in marble and gold, but to Jagannath Puri as his farewell gift. When he had the Afghans at his mercy and wrested Kashmir from them, he wanted the gates of the temple of Somnath back from them. Why should he be making all these Hindu demands? Whatever the breakaway that had been achieved from Hinduism, this greatest of our monarchs bridged in 40 years."[39]

A few years after Ranjit Singh's death, the British annexed his kingdom. Khushwant Singh describes how Sikh (more precisely, Khalsa) identity was fast disappearing when the British occupied Panjab. To Hindu Revivalists, this development was perfectly natural: Sikh identity was not religious but functional, and it disappeared when its circumstantial *raison d'être* disappeared. Sikhism was thrown up by Hindu society as part of the centuries-long "Hindu response to the Islamic onslaught"[40], and now that the *Pax Brittanica* made an end to the Hindu-Muslim struggle, it was natural that Sikhism was gradually reabsorbed.

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[37] Khushwant Singh: *Many Faces*, p.8.

[38] Khushwant Singh: *History of the Sikhs*, vol.1, p.289.

[39] Khushwant Singh: *Many Faces*, p.8.

[40] S.R. Goel: introduction to Ram Swarup: *Hindu-Sikh Relationship*, p.2.

8.5. Sikh identity and the British

It is the established Hindu Revivalist position that Sikhism as a separate religion is a British artefact. Khushwant Singh confirms this much, that the British came to the rescue of the dwindling Khalsa by setting up Sikh regiments to which only observant Khalsa Sikhs were allowed. This worked as "a kind of hot-house protection" to Sikh identity, and "by World War 1, a third of the British Indian Army were bearded Khalsa Sikhs".[41] This number may be exaggerated: Ram Swarup counts "19.2% in 1914", falling to "13.58% in 1930" (because by then, "the Government was less sure of their unquestioning loyalty").[42] All the same, to Sikh identity the Army recruitment was crucial, and our Sikh historian candidly admits: "So the first statutory guarantee of the continuation of the Khalsa came from a foreign power."[43]

A look at the census figures may be useful here. In 1881, ca. 41% of the Panjabis classified themselves as Hindus, only 5.5% as Sikhs; by the time of Partition, the percentage of "Hindus" had decreased to 26%, that of "Sikhs" increased to 13%. This had of course nothing to do with conversion, merely with the pressure on the Sahajdharis to become Kesadharis and assume an identity distinct from the Hindus. On the downside, however, the polarization imposed by the Khalsa pushed one of the branches of Sikhism in Sindh, the Amil Nanakpanthis, to rejecting Sikhism as a separate religion and casting their lot wholesale with Hinduism. Among them the family of L.K. Advani, who nonetheless calls himself "still spiritually a Sikh".

But even at the stage of the British rewards for Sikh distinctness, the separation of the Sikhs from Hindu society had not fully succeeded: "To start with, Hindus did not find this much of a problem. The Hindu who wanted to join the army simply stopped shaving and cutting his hair. (...) Nihal Chand became Nihal Singh and went into the British Army as a Sikh soldier."[44] According to Hindus, this was natural: Hindus did not see "becoming a Sikh" as conversion. The point was made very clearly by a non-political Hindu leader from Varanasi, who told me: "If the Sikhs don't want to call themselves Hindus, I will gladly call myself a Sikh."[45]

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[41] K. Singh: *Many Faces*, p.9.

[42] Ram Swarup: *Hindu-Sikh Relationship*, p.18.

[43] K. Singh: *Many Faces*, p.9.

According to Khushwant Singh, the loss of these privileges in 1947 undermined Sikh identity by taking its tangible benefits away: "Sikhs lost their minority privileges because there were going to be no minority privileges in a secular state (...) Their number in the Army started to dwindle. Their number in the Civil Service also began to come down. (...) The younger [generation] did not understand why they must grow their hair and beard, when they got no economic benefits for doing so. (...) When a Sikh father is asked: 'What do I get out of it?', he can no longer say: 'I can get you a job in the army if you have your hair and beard.'"[46]

In a non-Sikh state and society, Sikh identity would probably get dissolved in the long run, so the Khalsa leadership saw salvation in a separate state: "External props to the Khalsa separatism started crumbling. Leaders of the community felt that their flock was facing extinction and they must preserve it by whatever means they can. The only answer Akali leaders could think of—they are not used to thinking very deeply—was to have political power in their homeland."[47] It was to safeguard their identity by means of physical separation that some Akali factions started a movement of armed separatism.

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[44] K. Singh: *Many Faces*, p.9.

[45] Prof. Veer Bhadra Mishra, Mahant of Sankat Mochan Mandir, Varanasi, talking to me in 1989.

[46] K. Singh: *Many Faces*, p.12.

[47] K. Singh: *Many Faces*, p.12.

8.6. Sikhism as the sword-arm of Hinduism

Ram Swarup adds a psychological reason for the recent Sikh attempt to sever the ties with Hindu society and the Indian state: "'You have been our defenders', Hindus tell the Sikhs. But in the present psychology, the compliment wins only contempt—and I believe rightly. For self-despisement is the surest way of losing a friend or even a brother. It also gives the Sikhs an exaggerated self-assessment."[48]

Ram Swarup hints at the question of the *historicity* of the belief that "Sikhism is the sword-arm of Hinduism", widespread among Hindus. It is well-known that the Sikhs were the most combative in fighting Muslims during the Partition massacres, and that they were also singled out by Muslims for slaughter.[49] The image of Sikhs as the most fearsome among the Infidels still lingers in the Muslim mind; it is apparently for this reason that Saudi Arabia excludes Sikhs (like Jews) from employment within its borders. Yet, the story for the earlier period is not that clear-cut. Given the centrality of the image of Sikhism as the "sword-arm of Hinduism", it is well worth our while to verify the record of Sikh struggles against Islam.

In the Guru lineage, we don't see much physical fighting for Hinduism. Guru Nanak was a poet and a genuine saint, but not a warrior. His successors were poets, not all of them saintly, and made a living with regular occupations such as horse-trading. Guru Arjun's martyrdom was not due to any anti-Muslim rebellion but to the suspicion by Moghul Emperor Jahangir that he had supported a failed rebellion by Jahangir's son Khusrau, i.e. a Muslim palace revolution aimed at continuing the Moghul Empire but with someone else sitting on the throne. Arjun refused to pay the fine which

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[48] Ram Swarup: *Hindu-Sikh Relationship*, p.19.

[49] In Hindutva writings (e.g. in Jeevan Kulkarni's Writ Petition no.587 of 1989), there is frequent reference to a telegram allegedly sent by the Pakistani raiders to their military headquarters during the invasion of Kashmir in 1948: "All women raped, all Sikhs killed."

Jahangir imposed on him, not as an act of defiance against Moghul sovereignty but because he denied the charges (which amounted to pleading his loyalty to Jahangir); it was then that Jahangir ordered a tougher punishment. At any rate, Arjun was never accused of raising the sword against Jahangir, merely of giving temporary shelter to Khusrau.[50]

Tegh Bahadur's martyrdom in 1675 was of course in the service of Hinduism, in that it was an act of opposing Aurangzeb's policy of forcible conversion. An arrest warrant against him had been issued on non-religious and non-political charges, and he was found out after having gone into hiding; Aurangzeb gave him a chance to escape his punishment by converting to Islam. Being a devout Muslim, Aurangzeb calculated that the conversion of this Hindu sect leader would encourage his followers to convert along with him. The Guru was tortured and beheaded when he refused the offer to accept Islam, and one of his companions was sawed in two for having said that Islam should be destroyed.

At any rate, he stood firm *as a Hindu*, telling Aurangzeb that he loved his Hindu Dharma and that Hindu Dharma would never die,—a statement conveniently overlooked in most neo-Sikh accounts.[51] He was not a Sikh defending Hinduism, but a Hindu of the Nanakpanth defending his own Hindu religion. However, even Tegh Bahadur never was a warrior against the Moghul empire; indeed, the birth of his son Govind in the eastern city of Patna was a souvenir of his own enlistment in the party of a Moghul general on a military expedition to Assam.

Tegh Bahadur's son and successor, Govind Singh, only fought the Moghul army when he was forced to, and it was hardly to protect Hinduism. His men had been plundering the domains of the semi-independent Hindu Rajas in the hills of northeastern Panjab, *who had given him asylum* after his father's execution.[52] Pro-Govind accounts in the Hindutva camp equate Govind's plundering with the *Chauth* tax which Shivaji imposed to finance his fight against the Moghuls; they allege that the Rajas were selfishly attached to their wealth while Govind was risking his life for the Hindu cause. The Rajas, after failed attempts to restore law and order, appealed to their Moghul suzerain for help, or at least to the nearest Moghul governor. So, a confrontation ensued, not because Govind Singh had defied the mighty Moghul Empire, but because the Moghul Empire discharged its feudal duties toward its vassals, i.c. to punish what to them was an ungrateful guest turned robber.

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[50] All this is according to Khushwant Singh: *History of the Sikhs*, vol.1, p.60.

[51] Tegh Bahadur's Hindi reply to Aurangzeb is reproduced in full in Kshitish: *Storm in Punjab*, p.178. In pro-separatist publications, it is strategically omitted, e.g. in D. Greenlees: *Gospel of Guru Granth Sahib*, p.xcvii.

Govind was defeated and his two eldest sons killed in battle; many Sikhs left him in anger at his foolhardy tactics. During Govind Singh's flight, a Brahmin family concealed Govind's two remaining sons (Hindus protecting Sikhs, not the other way around), but they were found out and the boys were killed.[53]

The death of Govind's sons provides yet another demythologizing insight about Govind Singh through its obvious connection with his abolition of the Guru lineage. A believer may, of course, assume that it was because of some divine instruction that Govind replaced the living Guru lineage with the Granth, a mere book (a replacement of the Hindu institution of gurudom with the Book-centred model of

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[52] In the modern anti-Hindu variety of Sikh history, this becomes: "the Guru was forced into resistance by the incessant attacks of jealous Hill Rgjas, who could not tolerate the rise of Sikhism beside them", according to Duncan Greenlees: *Gospel of the Guru-Granth Sahib*, p.xcix.

[53] In neo-Sikh historiography, which has a strong anti-Brahmin bias (e.g. systematically concealing the presence of Brahmin officiants at the Gurus' weddings), the capture of the two boys is explained with the undocumented allegation that these Brahmins who protected them had "betrayed" them, e.g. Khushwant Singh: *History of the Sikhs*, vol.1, p.92.

Islam). However, a more down-to-earth hypothesis which takes care of all the facts is that after the death of all his sons, Govind Singh simply could not conceive of the Guru lineage as not continuing within his own family.[54]

After his defeat and escape (made possible by the self-sacrifice of a disciple who impersonated the Guru), Govind Singh in his turn became a loyal subject of the Moghul Empire. He felt he had been treated unfairly by the local governor, Wazir Khan, so he did what aggrieved vassals do: he wrote a letter of complaint to his suzerain, not through the hierarchical channels but straight to the Padeshah. In spite of its title and its sometimes defiant wording, this "victory letter" (*Zafar Nâma*) to Aurangzeb is fundamentally submissive. Among other things, Govind assures Aurangzeb that he is just as much an idol-breaker as the Padeshah himself: "I am the destroyer of turbulent hillmen, since they are idolators and I am the breaker of idols."[55] Aurangzeb was sufficiently pleased with the correspondence (possibly several letters) he received from the Guru, for he ordered Wazir Khan not to trouble Govind any longer.

After Aurangzeb's death in 1707, Govind tried to curry favour with the heir-apparent and effective successor, Bahadur Shah, and supported him militarily in the war of succession: his fight was for one of the Moghul factions and against the rival Moghul faction, not for Hinduism and against the Moghul Empire as such. In fact, one of the battles he fought on Bahadur Shah's side was against rebellious Rajputs.

As a reward for his services, the new Padeshah gave Govind a fief in Nanded on the Godavari river in the south, far from his natural constituency in Panjab. To acquaint himself with his new property, he followed Bahadur Shah on an expedition to the south (leaving his wives in Delhi under Moghul protection), but there he himself was stabbed by two Pathan assassins (possibly sent by Wazir Khan, who feared Govind Singh's influence on Bahadur Shah) in 1708. His death had nothing to do with any fight against the Moghuls or for Hinduism.

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[54] Incidentally, here again there is an Islamic parallel: Mohammed himself admitted that he would not have been the final prophet if Ibrahim, his son by his Coptic wife Mary, had lived.

[55] Translation by Khushwant Singh: *History of the Sikhs*, vol.1, p.87. *Pâdeshâh*: "sovereign", official title of the Moghul Emperor.

So far, it is hard to see where the Sikhs have acted as the sword-arm of Hinduism against Islam. If secularism means staying on reasonable terms with both Hindus and Muslims, we could concede that the Gurus generally did steer a "secular" course. Not that this is shameful: in the circumstances, taking on the Moghul Empire would have been suicidal.

In his last months, Govind Singh had become friends with the Hindu renunciate Banda Bairagi. This Banda went to Panjab and rallied the Sikhs around himself. At long last, it was he as a non-Sikh who took the initiative to wage an all-out offensive against the Moghul Empire. It was a long-drawn-out and no-holds-barred confrontation which ended in general defeat and the execution of Banda and his lieutenants (1716). Once more, the Sikhs became vassals of the Moghuls for several decades until the Marathas broke the back of the Moghul empire in the mid-18th century. Only then, in the wake of the Maratha expansion, did the Sikhs score some lasting victories against Moghul and Pathan power. They established an empire of sorts including most of the North-West, but as we already saw, its greatest monarch Ranjit Singh was a conscious and committed Hindu by any definition.

We may conclude that Ram Swarup has a point when he questions the Hindu attitude of self-depreciation and gratefulness towards the Sikh "sword-arm". Sikh history has its moments of heroism, but not particularly more than that of the Marathas or Rajputs. And like the Rajputs and Marathas, Sikhism also has a history of collaboration with the Moghul throne. Those who insist on glorifying Sikh or Rajput history, ought rather to reflect on the merits (for Hinduism) of collaboration with an unbeatable enemy: when Moghul power was at its strongest, collaboration by Hindu princes meant in practice that large parts of India were only under indirect Muslim control, so that Hindu culture could be preserved there.[56] But of course, in the rhetoric of heroism dear to nationalist movements, the compromise aspect of history is not that inspiring, and we should not expect to hear neo-Sikhs glorify "the wise collaborator Govind Singh".

8.7. Hindu role in estranging the Sikhs

The attitude of cringing Hindu gratitude to the "sword-arm" is not the only nor even the most important reason for the contempt which some Khalsa Sikhs developed toward everything Hindu during the past century. The British policy of privileging the Sikhs is probably the decisive factor, but we should not ignore the role which Hindus themselves have played in the estrangement of the Sikhs with their own type of contempt.

The Arya Samaj, as a genuinely fundamentalist movement, distinguished between "authentic" (Vedic) Hinduism and "degenerate" (defined as post-Vedic) forms of Hinduism. By campaigning for the Shuddhi ("purification", effectively conversion) of Sikhs, it implicitly declared the Sikhs to be either degenerate Hindus or non-Hindus.[57] Khushwant Singh describes the adverse effect of the Arya Samaj's campaign: "Fortunately for the Sikhs, Dayanand Saraswati was also very offensive in the language he used. He did not realize that he was treading on soft ground when he described guru Nanak as a *dambi*, an impostor.[58] (...) The Sikhs rejected Dayanand and the Samaj, and set up Singh Sabhas and the chief Khalsa Diwan to counteract Dayanand's movement. Kahan Singh of Nabha published a book entitled *'Ham Hindu nahin hain*[59] It was a categorical statement of rejection of Hinduism. The Arya Samaj can take the credit for driving Sikhs away from Hinduism."[60]

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[56] I mention only Sikhs and Rajputs as wise collaborators, for the Marathas, who had stood up to the Moghuls at a time when all the others felt compelled to collaborate, ended up collaborating with the Moghul throne at a time when the said justification had disappeared: given their military superiority in the 1770s and 80s, the Marathas could have replaced Moghul sovereignty (*pâdeshâhî*) with native sovereignty, but somehow they dragged their feet and continued to act as loyal vassals of a Moghul who had lost all military power and was about to accept a pension from the British East India Company (which continued the same pretence of respecting Moghul sovereignty until 1857).

[57] In the first years of Arya Samaj activity (and on a smaller scale even well into the 20th century), by contrast, there had been plenty of cooperation with the Sikhs, both being aware of the common ground between them as Hindu reform movements, see Kshitish Vedalankar: *Storm in Punjab*, p.166-170.

In the Arya Samaj version, Sikh pro-British "toadyism" versus Arya nationalism was a more decisive factor in their mutual estrangement. After Independence, Sikhs started arguing that their own contribution to the Freedom struggle had been the greatest given the high proportion of Sikhs among the martyrs. However, most of these fell during the Jallianwala Bagh shooting in Amritsar (1919), started as a peaceful gathering of people who had no intention of giving up their lives (the responsible officer was removed from his post, for the useless and unprovoked massacre totally deviated from British policy). The proportion of Sikhs who chose to wage their lives for Freedom was quite small; the one community which was heavily "overrepresented" among the freedom fighters executed or otherwise punished by the British was the much-maligned Brahmin caste.[61] It is a well-attested historical fact that the Sikh community as such was firmly loyalist (see Khushwant Singh, above, on the Sikhs in the British Army), even after the emotional estrangement from the British which followed the Jallianwala Bagh massacre. By contrast, the Arya Samaj can claim to have stood by the cause of Freedom, though it certainly has a history of compromise as well.

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[58] The allegation that Nanak was a well-intentioned man who wrongly pretended to be a Vedic scholar is made by Swami Dayananda Saraswati: *Light of Truth*, p.442-445, though the exact word "impostor" (*dambhî* should at any rate be translated more precisely as "pretender") is not used there. Dayananda attributed to Nanak some sentences disparaging the Vedas which are there in the Sikh canon but not uttered by Nanak himself. Nonetheless, he appreciated it in Nanak that he "saved some persons from embracing Mohammedanism" and that he remained a householder instead of becoming a Sadhu, family life being a Vedic duty. He also praised Govind Singh for fighting Islam.

[59] "We are not Hindus", 1898. Kahan Singh was royal tutor in the princely state of Nabha and, in Ram Swarup's description, "a *pakkâ* [impeccable] loyalist" (*Hindu-Sikh Relationship*, p.14). He was also a disciple of M.A. Macauliffe, who bequeathed the royalties of his books to him.

[60] Khushwant Singh: *Many Faces*, p.10.

As for Dayananda's allegation that Guru Nanak was a pretender, Arya Samaj authors Pandit Lekh Ram (then) and Kshitish Vedalankar (recently) have defended it, arguing that Nanak could not read Sanskrit and was therefore not qualified to speak out on the Vedas and the Puranas.[62] Modernists may sympathize with this irreverent and down-to-earth critique of a venerated saint, but it has a price, viz. the hostility of the saint's followers.

8.8. The Hindi-Panjabi controversy

Sikh separatists, and probably Sikhs in general, resented it when Hindus in Panjab registered Hindi as their mother-tongue in the 1951 and 1961 census. The Sikh plan was to carve out a Sikh-majority state under a linguistic cover, viz. as a Panjabi Suba, a Panjabi-speaking province: "in demanding a Punjabi-speaking state, they were in fact demanding a Sikh-majority state. They were giving a linguistic sugar coating to a basically communal demand."[63] In the 1950s, many provincial boundaries had been redrawn with the object of creating linguistically homogeneous states. Nehru had been opposed to this principle, but his hand was forced in 1952-53 by the fast unto death (ending in actual death, followed by widespread violence on government property) of Potti Sri Ramulu in support of the demand for a Telugu-speaking state. After states like Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra had been created on a linguistic basis, the Sikhs were dismayed that the Government kept on opposing the creation of a Panjabi-speaking state.

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[61] According to Meenakshi Jain ("The Plight of Brahmins", *Indian Express*, 18-9-1990, included in H.P. Lohia, ed.: *Political Vandalism*, p.56), Brahmins constituted 70% of the freedom fighters executed by the British; any list of pre-Independence Congress office-bearers confirms that among non-violent freedom fighters too, Brahmins, from B.G. Tilak and G.K. Gokhale to C. Rajagopalachari, were enormously over-represented. The Brahmin initiative in Hindu nationalism (Savarkar, Hedgewar) is also part of this phenomenon.

[62] Kshitish: *Storm in Punjab*, p.174.

The 1961 census, and in particular its item on language, became a crucial event in the campaign for the Panjabi Suba. Since language was used as a code for religion, Hindus joined the game: "Punjabi Hindus were persuaded to declare their language to be Hindi, which it is not, and not Punjabi, which it is."[64] This way, "they played into the hands of Sikh communalists: 'How can you trust this community? They are even willing to deny their mother tongue', they said."[65]

The Sikhs got their Panjabi Suba anyway, as a reward for their sterling loyalty to India in spite of Pakistani overtures during the 1965 war. But twenty years later, Arya Samaj polemicist Kshitish Vedalankar still defended the claim of the Panjabi Hindus that their mother tongue is Hindi: "What we call Panjabi today is only a wing of Hindi—Pashchimi [= 'Western'] Hindi."[66] The difference between language and dialect is indeed not always clear-cut, and the separate status of Panjabi is more a matter of politics than of linguistics (somewhat like the recent decision of the Croats and Bosnian Muslims to develop their own dialects of Serbo-Croat into separate languages).

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[63] Khushwant Singh: *Many Faces*, p.13.

[64] Khushwant Singh: *Many Faces*, p.13.

[65] Khushwant Singh: *Many Faces*, p.13.

[66] Kshitish: *Storm in Punjab*, p.179.

What might clinch the issue is that the Gurus themselves also used and encouraged non-Panjabi styles of Hindi: "Because of this association of Hindi with the masses, the Gurus found it proper to encourage Hindi poets and to popularise Hindi poetry. They themselves adopted Brajbhasha as the vehicle of their views."[67] By now, however, the development of Panjabi as a separate language has gone quite far, the Panjabi Suba is an accomplished fact, and this debate has lost its relevance. In Panjab and in Delhi, the BJP is now a great promoter of Panjabi, if only to humour its numerous Sikh constituents.

8.9. The message of Sikhism

Khushwant Singh describes the fact that most outsiders are not aware of anything constituting Sikh "identity" apart from beards and turbans, as a serious problem: "Most regard them as no more than a sect of bearded Hindus. It is a real problem and in some ways it does sum up the Sikh dilemma from the very beginning. (...) Any new religious community which breaks away from its parent body has to establish a separateness from the parent body."[68]

To Hindu Revivalists, this is a false problem: identity is merely the accidental outcome of historical processes or indeed of religious practices, but it is not a thing in itself, worth cultivating. Thus, if Jain monks want to wear handkerchiefs on their mouths and sweep the ground in front of their feet in order not to kill any tiny animals, that may be a fine application of their concept of non-violence, but it would be absurd if Jains started doing this for no other reason than to affirm Jain identity. It is alright if youth gangs impose on themselves artificial identities with distinguishing marks and signs and rituals, but that is a passing phase. Identity for the sake of identity is a concern of puberty, not more. "Identitarianism" is but one of the many fashionable ways to misunderstand and misrepresent Hindu revivalism: the Hindu problem is not with identity, it is precisely the *anti-Hindu* separatists in Sikhism, Jainism etc., who make an issue of identity.[69]

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[67] Kshitish Vedalankar: *Storm in Punjab*, p.181, quoting observations to this effect by E. Trumpp, G.A. Grierson and S.K. Chatterji (see also Chatterji: *Indo-Aryan and Hindi*, p.188, enumerating the Hindi dialects including Panjabi). *Braja-bhâshâ* was the then dominant Hindi dialect of the Yamuna region and the *lingua franca* of northern India from Panjab to Assam.

[68] Khushwant Singh: *Many Faces*, p.2.

It reflects favourably on Khushwant Singh's intellectual honesty that, while a staunch advocate of separate Sikh identity, he mentions some facts that seriously undermine the Sikh claim to a separate identity: "Sikhism did not evolve a distinct theology of its own like Jainism or Buddhism. It accepted a form of Vaishnavite Hinduism, giving it a new emphasis. Basically the gurus' teachings were Vedantic. Therefore there was not the same kind of breach from Hinduism as in the cases of Jainism and Buddhism. Sikhism accepted the Hindu code of conduct, its theory of the origin of the world, the purpose of life, the purpose of religion, samsara, the theory of birth-death-rebirth—these were taken in their entirety from Hinduism."[70]

That, then, is precisely the point argued by Hindu Revivalists: "Not only does the Adi Granth reproduce hundreds of passages from the older scriptures, but like the rest of the Sant literature it also follows the lead of the Upanishads and the Gita and the Yoga Vasishtha in all doctrinal points. Its theology and cosmology, its God-view and world-view, its conception of deity and man and his salvation, its ethics, philosophy and praxis and Yoga—all derive from that source. It believes in Brahma-vada, in Advaita, in So-ham, in Maya, in Karma, in rebirth, in Mukti and Nirvana, in the Middle Path (in its yogic sense)".[71] This is a far cry from recent Sikh self-presentation, when apologists describe Sikhism as "prophetic and monotheist", or as "rationalist"[72], or as "secular"[73], but certainly not as "taken in its entirety from Hinduism".

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[69] After demolishing the Communist rhetoric about the RSS being "fascist", Gérard Heuzé (*Où va l'Inde moderne?*, p.123) wonders whether "the invention of a category of *'Third-World mass identitarianism'* would not be more pertinent than the never-ending references to fascism".

[70] Khushwant Singh: *Many Faces*, p.4. This point is dramatized in his joke: Sikh scholars sat down to take Hinduism out of the Granth Sahib. They took it out page by page. In the end, however, they were left holding the binding cover in their hands.

8.10. Sikh distinctiveness

Kshitish Vedalankar, the Arya Samajist author of one of the rare post-Independence anti-Sikh tracts (mainly focusing on Sikh collaboration with the British), starts out by emphasizing that Guru Nanak "called himself a Hindu. According to *Janamsâkhî*, he wore a sacred thread (*yajñopavît*) and had a lock of hair (*chotî*) on his head. After him till the fifth Guru, each had his sacred thread ceremony performed, were married according to Vedic rites, used to apply *tilak* and used to hear tales from Vedas and Puranas."[74]

But there we already get a hint of an early separation: only until the fifth Guru did the Sikhs follow Vedic rites. As Khushwant Singh points out, the Sikhs have gradually introduced separate rituals: "The third guru, Amar Das (...) introduced new rituals, new ceremonies to be performed at birth, marriage and death."[75] It seems that Sikh separateness does have a pre-British origin. Or at least, it seems that early on, the Sikhs developed a certain distinctiveness. But then, so many Hindu sects have their distinctive customs, dress codes and other externals. The Sikhs have their own Scripture, their own sacred city, their own chief temple, their own priesthood, but almost by definition, every Hindu *panth* has some such material things of its own.[76] Kashi is the city of Shiva, Vrindavan is dedicated to Krishna, Ayodhya to Rama, Kanchipuram to Kamakshi, and they are all Hindu sacred cities.

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[71] Ram Swarup: "Hindu Roots of Sikhism", *Indian Express*, 24-4-1991. *Brahma-vâda*: "doctrine of the Absolute"; *Mâyâ*: "the power to create delusions", hence "the world as a delusion created by this power of the Divine"; *So-'ham*: "Him am I", statement of monistic oneness of individual and divine consciousness; *Advaita*: "non-duality"; *Karma*: "law of cause and effect spanning across incarnations": *Mukti*: "liberation"; *Nirvâṇa*: "blowing out", hence "ego annihilation".

[72] E.g. Gurnam Kaur: *Reason and Revelation in Sikhism.*

[73] E.g. V.R. Bhattacharya: *Secular Thoughts of the Sikh Gurus*, honoured with a foreword by Giani Zail Singh, President of India.

[74] Kshitish Vedalankar: *Storm in Punjab*, p.19. *Janamsâkhî* is a biography of Guru Nanak.

[75] K. Singh: *Many Faces*, p.6. The separate Sikh wedding ritual was consolidated by the Anand Marriage Act 1909.

The *panths* founded by sants like Kabir, Chaitanya, Ravidas, give a special place to the writings of their founder, but not an exclusive place. The Guru Granth equally contains writings of some non-Sikh bhakti poets including Kabir, and thousands of references to such Hindu concepts and characters as Rama, Krishna, Veda, Omkara, Amrit.[77] Sikh names are full of Hindu elements: Hari (= Vishnu), Rama, Krishna and his epithets (*Har-kishan, Har-govind*), Arjun, the Vedic god Indra (*Yog-indr, Sur-indr*).[78] The Hari Mandir, dedicated to Hari/Vishnu, is as sacred to Vaishnavas as any of their non-Sikh temples; its tank was already an old Hindu place of pilgrimage, where Maharana Ikshvaku is said to have performed yajnas. (The 1875 edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* says in its entry on Amritsar that it has sacred tank with a temple *dedicated to Vishnu* in the middle).

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[76] For *panth* (from Sanskrit *patha*, "path") or its synonym *sampradâya*, I might have used the term "sect", but in recent decades this term has been identified with "sectarian" phenomena to the extent of making it purely pejorative; so I have retained the Hindi term.

[77] An near-exact count is given in K.P. Agrawala: *Adi Shrî Gurû Granth Sâhib kî Mahimâ* (Hindi: "The greatness of the original sacred Guru scripture"), p.2, and in Ram Swarup: "Hindu roots of Sikhism", *Indian Express*, 24-4-1991. Examples: ca. 8,300 times *Hari* (630 times by Nanak alone), 2,400 times *Râma* (the god-name whose constant remembrance leads to Liberation), 550 times *Parabrahman* (the Absolute), 400 times *Omkâra* (the primeval sound Om).

[78] About Sikh devotion to Ram, see Rajendra Singh: *Sikkha Itihâsa mein Râma Janmabhûmi.*

And so on: sects may and do distinguish themselves by a lineage of gurus, physical marks, specially dedicated places of pilgrimage, and nobody is disputing the right of the Sikhs to do the same things, but that does not put them outside the Hindu fold.

8.11. No Hindu, no Muslim

Khushwant Singh's final and decisive argument for the non-Hindu identity of Sikhism is this: "Guru Nanak did start a new religion. He said so clearly in the year 1500 or thereabouts, when he had his mystical experience. He went to bathe in a stream and was missing for three days. His first statement as he came out was: *'Na koi Hindu, na koi Mussalman'.* You can interpret that statement in many ways. But you cannot deny that what he intended to imply was that he was introducing a new system of ethics and metaphysics."[79]

Ethics and metaphysics are serious subjects; three days is a short time if you want to free yourself from your acquired notions of ethics and metaphysics, and start a whole new religion. In fact, for all we know, Guru Nanak continued the practices of the Bhakti saints that had come before him, starting with the mental or oral repetition of the Divine Name, *Râma nâma.* Moreover, isn't it strange that the statement which founds a whole new separate religion does not even mention this new religion? If Guru Nanak's discovery, "neither Hindu nor Muslim", had meant the founding of a new religion, he might have added a positive conclusion: "Neither Hindu nor Muslim, but Sikh!"

At any rate, the insight with which he came back from his three days' retreat, as quoted by Khushwant Singh, was entirely within the Hindu tradition. "There is no Hindu, there is no Muslim" (for that is the literal translation, and it makes a difference) does not mean "I, Nanak, am neither Hindu nor Muslim", it means a wholesale rejection of the Hindu and Muslim identities valid for all self-described Hindus and

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[79] K. Singh: *Many Faces*, p.5.

Muslims as well. It means that the Self (*Atman*, the timeless indweller, the object-subject of his "mystical experience") is beyond worldly divisions like those between different religions and sects. The Self is neither black nor white, neither big nor small, neither Hindu nor Muslim, neither this nor that; *neti neti*, in the Upanishadic phrase. This insight is as typically Hindu as you can get.

The Self, the objectless self-contained consciousness, is *nirguṇa*, beyond the qualities that make for difference between human beings. As a contemporary Hindu spiritual teacher said: "What is Self-realization? By what does a 'realized' person distinguish himself? Very simple, the special thing about him is this: one who is 'realized', realizes that he is the same as everybody else."[80] The Self has no separate identity, neither individual nor communal.

When we get to this conceptual level, we can see that *communal identity* in Hindu-Sikh tradition is a superficial reality, relatively acceptable and inevitable in the temporal world, but unreal from the angle of the timeless and colourless Self. By contrast, it has an absolute value in Islam, which decides on eternal heaven and eternal hell on the basis of communal identity: as per the Quran, all "unbelievers" (Sikhs as much as Hindus) carry a one-way ticket to hell. At the fundamental level, for all its adoption of external elements following Islamic models, Sikhism is not a middling position between Hinduism and Islam. Sikhism has never repudiated the doctrine of the Self, which is entirely non-Islamic and entirely Hindu.[81]

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[80] Dr. Pukh Raj Sharma of the Ram-Rukmini Institute, Jodhpur, speaking in Mechelen (Belgium), May 1988.

[81] Sir Mohammed Iqbal, the spiritual father of Pakistan, did develop a concept of *khudî*, "selfhood", but he opposed it to Sufi notions of *fanâ* (ego-extinction and the absorption in God, equivalent to and possibly evolved from the Buddhist notion of *Nirvâṇa*, and similar to the Upanishadic true impersonal Self); his non-mystical *khudî* is more akin to modern psychological notions of "self-actualization" and the like, perhaps best approaching the Hindu concept of *swadharma*, "one's own duty", but more individualistic.

After reading a bit of Sikh scripture and the arguments put forward by Hindu and Sikh authors about the roots of Sikhism, it is now my considered opinion that the profoundly Hindu character of basic Sikh doctrine is undeniable. So far, Ram Swarup and his school are right. However, Sikhism hasn't stopped developing with Guru Nanak's Hindu utterances, and it has just as undeniably adopted some Islamic elements and attitudes at the expense of some of its Hindu identity. Today, it would therefore be too simplistic to just affirm that "Sikhs are Hindus". For Hindu nationalists, that presents a problem which cannot be resolved with debates on definitions. The only solution which could satisfy them is that Sikhs themselves make a choice to go back to the original inspiration of Guru Nanak and shrug off the superficial but ever-hardening separateness which has developed after Nanak had gone, and particularly after British policy set Sikhs against Hinduism.

8.12. The Khalistani failure

To quite an extent, the feeling that "Sikhs are Hindus" is mutual. Till today, though on a lesser scale than in the past centuries, Sikh caste groups continue to intermarry with Hindu non-Sikh members of the same castes rather than with Sikh members of other castes. A more specifically religious indication is that Master Tara Singh, the acknowledged leader of the Sikhs since at least the eve of Partition, was a co-founder of the Vishva Hindu Parishad in 1964.

The strongest evidence for Hindu-Sikh unity is certainly the fact that no matter how hard the Khalistani separatists of the 1980s tried, they could not get Hindu-Sikh riots going. Though Hindus became wary of Sikhs, they never responded to the Khalistanis' selective massacres of Hindus with attacks on Sikhs, nor did ordinary Sikhs ever start the kind of attacks on Hindus commonly witnessed as the opening scene of Hindu-Muslim riots. The Khalistani episode was a confrontation between Sikh separatists and the police and army of the secular Indian state, not one between Sikhs and Hindus. The surprising fact is that "there were no communal riots in Punjab even in the worst days of terrorism".[82]

The massacre of Sikhs by activists of the secularist Congress Party in Delhi after Indira Gandhi's murder by her Sikh bodyguards in 1984 was not a Hindu-Sikh riot, in spite of secularist efforts to "rationalize" it as one. Even Khushwant Singh admitted that RSS and BJP activists had saved many Sikhs while Congress secularists were killing them: "It was the Congress leaders who instigated mobs in 1984 and got more than 3000 people killed. I must give due credit to RSS and the BJP for showing courage and protecting helpless Sikhs during those difficult days. No less a person than Atal Bihari Vajpayee himself intervened at a couple of places to help poor taxi drivers."[83]

For this very reason, Khushwant Singh himself advised Delhi Sikhs to vote for BJP candidate L.K. Advani in the 1989 Lok Sabha elections.[84] And so they did. In the 1991 and 1996 Lok Sabha elections and in the 1993 Vidhan Sabha elections in Delhi, the Sikh vote largely went to the BJP. In 1996, the Akali Dal faction in the newly elected Lok Sabha was one of a few small parties willing to support the 13-day BJP Government led by A.B. Vajpayee. An alliance of the BJP and the moderate Sikh party Akali Dal (Badal) swept the Panjab Vidhan Sabha elections of 1997, and made new progress in the Lok Sabha elections of 1998. Only in the last few years, when the memory of the massacres started to recede, did Sikhs in Delhi relax their collective pro-BJP and anti-Congress position.

The BJP, for its part, is full of gestures towards its Sikh constituency, e.g. one of the first things the BJP did after coming to power in Delhi (union territory), was to declare Panjabi an official language, so that many signboards in Delhi are now quadrilingual: English-Hindi-Urdu-Panjabi. With regret, a Sikh supporter of the United Front notes how the BJP is attracting the Sikh vote: "The BJP, on its part, has accommodated Sikhs in several states and even at the central level. Gurjant Singh Brar in Rajasthan, Jaspal Singh in Gujarat and Harcharan Singh Balli are Cabinet rank Ministers in these BJP-ruled states. The short-lived Vajpayee Government had a Sikh Minister, Sartaj Singh from Hoshangabad (Madhya Pradesh). (...) By taking strong action against the guilty persons of 1984 riots, the BJP has won over the sympathy of the Sikhs."[85]

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[82] Manini Chatterjee: "The BJP: Political Mobilization for Hindutva", *South Asia Bulletin*, p.17.

[83] Khushwant Singh: "Congress (I) is the Most Communal Party", *Publik Asia*, 16-11-1989. In Delhi, taxi drivers are typically Sikhs.

[84] *Sunday*, 26-11-1989: "Veteran journalist Khushwant Singh has gone public with his support for (...) L.K. Advani. At considerable personal expense."

The VHP and other Hindu organizations have adopted a Sikh innovation (perhaps a truly original contribution of Sikhism), viz. Kar Seva, "hand service", meaning the collective participation of ordinary Hindus in the building of temples. Thus, the unskilled labour in the construction of the Swaminarayan temple in Neasden (London, 1995) was performed by Hindu doctors, accountants, shopkeepers and other amateurs. The VHP has the same plans for its projected Rama-Janmabhoomi temple in Ayodhya. Hindu-Sikh unity celebrations are organized both in India and abroad, where small numbers in a foreign society force Hindus and Sikhs to remember their common roots, e.g. in New Jersey:

"The gala event started with chanting of mantras followed by *Vande Mâtaram*. The speakers emphasized the age-old relationship and similarities that bind Hindus and Sikhs together. They mentioned the fact that Lord Rama's name appears thousands of times in the Guru Granth Sahib and that the original name of Golden Temple is Hari Mandir Sahib. Sardar Jagjit Singh Lamba said that Guru Nanak Dev and Guru Gobind Singh were the descendants of Lav [c.q.] Kush, both sons of Lord Rama."[86]

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[85] Swadesh Bahadur Singh (editor of the *Sher-i-Panjâb* weekly): "Cabinet berth for a Sikh", *Indian Express*, 31-5-1996. His point is that to counter BJP influence, the then United Front Government led by Deve Gowda should court the Sikhs by inducting a Sikh as Minister. Note how this communal demand (viz. for inducting someone on the basis of his communal identity) is justified: "The UF should gain confidence of millions of *secular*-minded Sikhs in India and abroad by inducting a Sikh in its Cabinet. *Secularism* is a factor in India's unity and integrity. The Sikhs with glorious *secular* traditions have thus a right to their representation in the Front's new Cabinet." (emphasis added)

After the defeat of Khalistani militancy, there has indeed been a remarkable rapprochement between Hindus and Sikhs. Whether this will lead to a full reabsorption of the Sikh community by Hinduism remains to be seen.

8.13 Conclusion

In theory, the case for the basic Hindu identity of Sikhism is overwhelming. Unlike Jainism and Buddhism, Sikhism has gone through all the developments of Hinduism until the Moghul period. It has no separate theology or philosophy, no separate ethics or social structure. It has borrowed elements from Islam, but not the decisive ones: belief in a notion of a true God versus false gods, hence in iconoclasm, and belief in a monopolistic prophethood. There is nothing in Sikhism at which a Hindu should feel offended.

In practice, however, Sikh separatism has scored important victories. Most Sikhs would object to their inclusion in the Hindu category. In this separatist endeavour, they are encouraged by the non-Hindus and the secularists, whose attitude to religious issues is always one of crass superficialism. Looking at the matter superficially, the mere existence of the labels "Hindu" and "Sikh" is enough to prove the existence of two distinct entities going by these names. Any subtler understanding which sees the profound rootedness of Sikhism in Hinduism is routinely blackened as a Hindu conspiracy of the "boa constrictor" type.

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[86] Devender Singh Sawhney and Narain Kataria: "Hindu-Sikh Unity Celebration in America", *Organiser*, 14-12-1997.

And yet, such deeper understanding is the only way forwards. It is ignoble and below the dignity of human intelligence to remain stuck in the prevailing situation where a religion is defined as separate on no better grounds than externalities like turbans and beards.

The case for Sikh separateness is based on nothing more than, firstly, a handful of ambiguous sentences in the Sikh canon, as against thousands which unambiguously put Sikhism inside the Hindu fold; and secondly, puerile loud-mouthing and violence. Of all the borderline cases considered in this book, Sikhism is next to Ramakrishnaism by far the clearest: apart from separatism, its contents are entirely part of Hinduism even if the latter is narrowly defined.

9. Are Indian tribals Hindus?

9.1. "Animism"

Hindu Revivalists, unlike Hindu traditionalists, agree that the so-called tribals of India are Hindus. V.D. Savarkar wrote: "Every person is a Hindu who regards and owns this Bharat Bhumi, this land from the Indus to the seas, as his Fatherland as well as Holyland, i.e. the land of the origin of his religion (...) Consequently the so-called aboriginal or hill tribes also are Hindus: because India is their Fatherland as well as their Holyland of whatever form of religion or worship they follow."[1]

Abhas Chatterjee, the Brahmin-born revivalist married to a lady from the Oraon tribe, writes: "This Sanatana Dharma has any number of branches and offshoots. Within its fold, we have the Vaidika and the Tantrika, the Buddhist and the Jain; we have the Shaiva and the Vaishnava, the Shakta and the Sikh, the Arya Samaj and the Kabirpanth; we have in its fold the worshippers of Ayappa in Kerala, of *Sarna* in Chotanagpur and of *Doni-pollo* in Arunachal Pradesh. (...) through all these forms and variations flows an underlying current of shared spirituality which makes us all Hindus and gives us an intrinsic sense of harmony."[2]

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[1] V.D. Savarkar: *Hindu Rashtra Darshan*, p.77.

[2] A. Chatterjee: *Hindu Nation*, p.4. *Doni-pollo* is "sun & moon" as the basic polarity of the cosmos as seen from Arunachal Pradesh, roughly equivalent to Chinese *yin & yang*. The term *Sarna* "refers to a grove of sal trees where the tribes of Chhotanagpur venerate their God and their spirits. It is therefore the name of a sacred grove. Today *Sarna* is used to designate the ancestral religion of these tribes for which there is no specific term", explains Y. Philip Barjo: "The religious life of the Sarna tribes", *Indian Missiological Review*, June 1997, p.42.

Before Independence, the census had a category "animist" or "tribal", which contained ca. 2.5% of the population, much less than the present Scheduled Tribe population of nearly 8% (the difference is made up of tribals who declared themselves or were registered as Hindus or Christians). The Constitution and the census in independent India do not recognize this broad category of "animism" any longer. Depending on the context, they classify the non-Christian tribals as Hindus for legal purposes; or put them under the heading of each tribe's own "religion" separately. In tribal areas tribal customary law is recognized and special protections for tribals (not as a religious but as a sociological category) exclude non-tribal Hindus along with non-tribal non-Hindus from ownership or habitation inside the tribal "inner line".[3]

The ambiguity of the tribal position vis-à-vis Hinduism allows for terminological manipulation. When Hindus say they feel besieged, this is laughed off with the argument that they are more than 80% of the population; which they are not if tribals are counted separately. However, when Hindus mention the Muslim right to polygamy as a case of Muslim privilege, the secularist reply is that polygamy is actually higher among Hindus; which it is (in absolute though of course not in relative figures), if tribals are counted as Hindus. Reports are quoted which "showed that whereas 5.07 per cent of Muslims in the country were polygamous, 5,08 per cent of Hindus, too, were polygamous."[4] Of polygynous marriages contracted in 1961-71, "4.31% of Muslim as compared to 5.06%

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[3] Art.244 of the Constitution, and its amendments, vide P.M. Bakshi: *The Constitution of India*, p.160-161, p.259-277.

[4] Smita Gupta: "The Numbers War", *Times of India*, 10/12/1995, referring to a 1974 report, *Status of Women in India*. The figures were actually those of the 1961 census: "a 1961 study showed Hindus were more polygamous (5.8 percent) than Ms (5.73 percent) (Mainstream, 27-3-1993, p.5)", according to A. Bonner: *Democracy in India*, p.91. Note that claims for the 1990s are based on figures from 1961, just six years after polygamy had been prohibited by the 1955 Hindu Marriage Act, i.e. when legally established Hindu polygamous households were still numerous, unlike in the 1990s.

of Hindu marriages were found to be polygynous".[5] This is claimed to show that "Hindus are slightly more polygamous than Muslims in India" (in absolute though by far not in relative figures), *quod erat demonstrandum.*[6] However, the same source clarifies that within the broad Hindu category, "the highest frequency of polygyny was found among tribals, followed by Buddhists and Jains", categories which are classified as legal Hindus but are otherwise claimed to be non-Hindu.[7]

So, when convenient, as in this case for polemical purposes, viz. to increase the incidence of "Hindu" polygamy, tribals (along with Buddhists and Jains) are counted as Hindus. Otherwise they are not, and in that case, Hindu discourse treating tribals as Hindus is decried as "assimilative communalism" or "boa constrictor". This illustrates once more how religious categorization in India is politicized through and through.

9.2. Tribal-Hindu kinship: influence

Can the question whether tribals are Hindus be decided, or is this a matter of arbitrary definitions? A distinction may first of all be made between:

1. cultural Hindu *influence* interiorized by the tribals in recent centuries;

2. typological or *formal similarities* setting both Hinduism and the tribal religions apart from the prophetic-monotheist religions;

3. cultural Hindu-tribal *kinship* since hoary antiquity.

To start with the first point: except for the far North-East, tribals all over India have been profoundly influenced by literate Hinduism, and a lot of their religious terminology is borrowed from it, e.g. the Oraons call their supreme deity *Dharmesh* or *Bhagwan*, reportedly replacing the Oraon term

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[5] A.M. Mujahid: *Conversion to Islam*, p.132.

[6] A.M. Mujahid: *Conversion to Islam*, p.132.

[7] A.M. Mujahid: *Conversion to Islam*, p.132.

Biri-Belas, "sun-lord".[8] The Santals sometimes call Him *Thakur*, Hindi for "landlord".[9] The famous Marxist scholar S.K. Chatterjee understood that there had been not only a profound biological mixing between "Aryans" and "Aboriginals", but also an "inevitable commingling of the legends and traditions of the two races united by one language, a commingling which has now become well-nigh inextricable".[10] Thus, about the Coorg tribals, Harold Gould writes: "What is there among the Coorgs that in not Hindu? Nothing, because the Coorgs are Hindus. And they are Hindus essentially because they adhere to Hindu values."[11]

Except perhaps in Nagaland, Sanskritic-Hindu (or in some places Buddhist, equally "Aryan") influence on tribal culture is in evidence throughout India, though in varying degrees. This, however, is in itself not a sufficient ground for classifying tribal people as "Hindu", anymore than the retention of some Hindu customs among Indian Muslims would be sufficient to classify them as Hindus.

9.3. Tribal-Hindu kinship: formal similarity

The most obvious similarity between Hinduism and every tribal religion described by observers (both in India and elsewhere) is typological: regardless of mutual influences or common origins, the fact is that they share an element of

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[8] Varghese Palatty Koonathan: "The Religious World-view of the Oraons", *Sevartham* 1994, p.102. Hindi terminology and even Hindi as first language is making big inroads in the tribal cultures of Chhotanagpur; even Christian missionaries, though always accused of fomenting tribal separatism, are opening Hindi-medium schools, a development which may lead to the loss of the tribals' linguistic identity.

[9] J. Troisi: *Tribal Religion*, p.74.

[10] S.K. Chatterjee: *Indo-Aryan and Hindi* (1960), p.56, quoted in Mahadev Chakravarti: *The Concept of Rudra-Shiva through the Ages*, p.69. The "two races" are supposed to be the "Aryan invaders" and the "aboriginals".

[11] Harold Gould: •Sacralization of a Social Order•, p.1, against the description of certain Coorg rituals as "pre-Hindu" by M.N. Srinivas: •Religion and Society among the Coorgs of South India•. Ofcourse, the very notion of "pre-Hindu" is questionable.

polytheism, even if sometimes philosophically transcended in a concept of a supreme or all-encompassing divine essence. Polytheism is a basic pattern of religion which tribal and Hindu traditions have in common. This polytheism was duly noted by European discoverers in all continents, but in the 19th century, European academics started developing a theory of *Urmonotheismus*, a primeval monotheism still existing just underneath the surface of many tribal religions.[12] This scheme was also applied to Indian tribal religions.

According to some Christian authors, tribal religion differs radically from Hinduism because, in the words of George Soares-Prabhu: "All the tribals are monotheists and therefore they believe in one God."[13] Or: "Despite the inferences of the Niyogi Report, the Aborigines *are* capable of recognizing the inner harmony between their beliefs and the Christian faith. It is their monotheistic faith, as we have noted, and their belief in reward and punishment for good and evil deeds, that have prepared them for a natural assimilation to the Christian faith."[14] Or: "Sarna spirituality is marked by a strong belief in one God."[15]

This assertion is completely at variance with almost every first-hand description of tribal religion in India. According to the Christian social scientist Joseph Troisi, the Santals have no less than ten categories of deities, from ancestral spirits through village deities to the well-known Puranic Hindu deities and the traditional tribal gods associated with the elements.[16] An NGO worker in Manipur reports that the Meitei natives worship, among others, the Goddess Panthoibi, "who connects all events with each other", the Goddess Nongthang-Leima, "who mastered thunder and lightning in the chaos which preceded the world and predicted the first rain", and the Goddess Leimaren of "justice and revenge".[17]

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[12] E.g. about the attribution of monotheism to the Maori, see Jane Simpson: "Io as supreme being: intellectual colonization of the Maori?", *History of Religions*, August 1997. She notes that since the 1920s, a vast corpus has been created about "Io" as the supposed mono-God of the Maori, and that lately, a native scholar and a missionary have jointly challenged this notion as a projection, a colonial-age "textual artifact" resulting from missionary influence.

[13] George M. Soares-Prabhu: *Tribal Values in the Bible*, p.99.

[14] A. Soares: *Truth Shall Prevail*, p. 267. The Niyogi Committee was a fact-finding committee in the tribal belt of eastern-central India in the 1950s which criticized the missionaries for disturbing the social life of the tribals with their proselytization. Its *Report* has been republished by Voice of India: *Vindicated by Time* (1998).

[15] Y. Philip Barjo: "The religious life of the Sarna tribes", *Indian Missiological Review*, June 1997, p.46.

Another NGO worker writes in support of a struggle of tribals in Karnataka for the right to stay in their traditional habitat, now part of the Nagarhole National Park, and quotes one of them as explaining why they want to stay there: "This is where *our gods* live. Now we can go to *them* and ask *them* for support. If we move, that will become impossible."[18] Can this honestly be called "monotheism"?

In the face of this well-attested god-pluralism among the tribals, the thesis of tribal monotheism could be saved by identifying different gods as one, e.g. the Santal sun-god Sing Bonga and the mountain-god Marang Buru, all faces of One God.[19] It remains difficult, however, to fuse this Sun God with his polar opposite, the Earth Mother, whom most tribals including the Santals worship, and whose cult pervades popular Hinduism as well.[20] At any rate, the alleged "unity behind the diversity" is not exactly un-Hindu. On the contrary, Hindus have tried to prove Hindu monotheism with the very same argument of an "underlying" unity, and with good scriptural authority, viz. the Vedic verse: "The wise call the One Being by many names."[21] Every logic which can make the Santals monotheistic would make the Hindus monotheistic as well.

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[16] J. Troisi: *Tribal Religion*, p.75-79. The writer consistently uses the term "Santal pantheon", which is polytheistic enough.

[17] Ruth Waterman: "Fakkeldraagsters in Manipur" (Dutch: "Female torch-bearers in Manipur"), *India Nu* (Utrecht), Jan. 1997. Far from being a votary of Hindu nationalism, she advocates anti-Indian separatism in Manipur and speaks of "annexation by India", "Indian occupation" etc.

[18] Erik Robbemont: "Nationaal Park, verboden toegang" [Dutch: "National Park, No Entry"], *India Nu* (Utrecht), Jan. 1997; emphasis added.

[19] Thus George M. Soares-Prabhu: *Tribal Values in the Bible*, p.99.

[20] See Pupul Jayakar: *The Earth Mother*, and Johnson Vadakumchary: "The Earth Mother and the Indigenous people of India", *Dharma*, January 1993.

The typological similarity of tribal religion and (one layer of) Hinduism can be summed up thus: no matter how different the names and mythical personae of the Hindu and the tribal gods, both religions are equally *Pagan*. Even if the Oraon deity *Biri-belas*, "sun-lord", is in no way borrowed from Hinduism's cult of *Sûrya*, fact remains that both traditions practise sun-worship, which the Abrahamic religions prohibit (Athahualpa the Inca was killed by the Spanish because he remained loyal to the Sun-God). The Santals worship the sun as their supreme deity, *Sing-Bonga*, but even if he were their only god, his worship would still be "idolatry", worshipping a creature instead of the Creator.[22]

Guru Golwalkar locates the formulation of the principle underlying the cosmic spirituality of Paganism in the Gita: "In the Bhagavad Gita, Sri Krishna, while denoting the forms in which the spirit is more manifest than in others (...) closes the series of manifestations with the declaration: 'Every such element as is endowed with glory, brilliance and power, know that to be a manifestation of a Spark of My Divine Effulgence.'"[23]

This text unites polytheism and monotheism, and instructs the neophyte how to select objects of worship for a polytheistic pantheon under the aegis of the one All-

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[21] Rigveda 1:164:46.

[22] According to Y. Philip Barjo ("The religious life of the Sarna tribes, *Indian Missiological Review*, June 1997, p.47), "Sing Bonga's purity demands that he be offered sacrifices only of things that are white. Hence he is given sacrifices of white goats, white fowls, white gulainchi flowers, white cloth, sugar, milk etc." The Indian preference for white-skinned marriage partners (as attested in the matrimonial advertisements) is often explained as a hold-over of the "race pride" of the "white Aryan invaders" or, more historically, of the Turks and Englishmen, but Sing Bonga's "aboriginal" preference for white pushes the phenomenon farther back.

[23] M.S. Golwalkar: *Bunch of Thoughts*, p.472. The verse is Gita 10:41.

Pervader.[24] For, the distinctive trait of Paganism as opposed to prophetic monotheism is not that Pagans fail to acknowledge a unique and unifying principle, but that they fail to see a conflict between this principle of unity and a principle of multiplicity. In this respect at least, Hinduism and tribal "animism" are one.

9.4. Tribal-Hindu kinship: common roots

Now for the third possibility of Hindu-tribal similarity: apart from recent influence (which even exists between Hinduism and Indian Christianity) and formal similarity (which even exists between Hinduism and the tribal religions of Africa and America), is there not also an ancient kinship, which would make tribal and Hindu traditions branches of a single tree in a historical sense?

Pre-Harappan cave dwellings contain cultic elements which are still found in Hinduism today, e.g. in a Palaeolithic site in the Siddhi district of Madhya Pradesh (10,000 to 8,000 BC), a Mother Goddess shrine was found which contains the same symbols which Shaktic cults use till today,—squares, circles, swastikas and esp. triangles which are part of the iconography of Durga even in urban Hinduism.[25] A Flemish expert on tribal culture told me of a similar finding in the Bastar area; when the painted triangular stone was dug up, the tribal (Gond) guide at once started to do puja before it.[26] But the point is that the very same cultic object would fit in a Hindu temple in Varanasi just as well: living Hinduism continues many practices from hoary tribal antiquity.

Even authors assuming the tribal-separatist viewpoint admit to the peaceful interaction and intrinsic closeness of

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[24] "All-pervader", i.e. *Vishnu*, of whom Krishna is considered an incarnation.

[25] Pupul Jayakar: *The Earth Mother*, p.20-22.

[26] Jan Van Alphen: personal communication, May 1992. He related that the report could not be published in India because the establishment refused to acknowledge the continuity of their own religion with the despised tribal culture (quite in contrast with the Hindutva position which affirms the continuity between tribal and Vedic culture).

Hinduism and the tribal religion, i.c. of the Santals: "Unlike Christians the Hindus have made no effort to convert the Santals into Hindus. This may be accounted for as the proximal similarity between the two religions. On the basis of close observation on the Santals it has also been found that in stray cases when Hindu girls are married to Santals there is a good deal of change and in due course she is also following the Santal religion. (...) The Santals are trying to keep their religion almost unaltered. This is also possible because there is hardly any conflict and contradiction between Hindu and Santal religions."[27]

Nonetheless, the *communis opinion* is this: "The culture of the Adivasi differs strongly from that of most Indians: they are neither Hindus nor Muslims. Their gods and ancestral spirits live in the mountains, the rivers and the trees. Sacrificial places lie hidden in the forest, not in a stone temple built for the purpose."[28] If the tribals worship in the open air, this constitutes a practical though not a fundamental difference with modern mainstream Hinduism, which is largely based in temples; but ancient Vedic Hindus also worshipped in the open air. As for the worship of ancestors and nature spirits, this definitely stamps the tribals as non-Muslims and non-Christians, but is it also non-Hindu?

Guru Golwalkar comments: "These protagonists of separatism argue that these 'tribals' worship things like trees, stones and serpents. Therefore they are 'animists' and cannot be called 'Hindus'. Now this is something which only an ignoramus who does not know the ABC of Hinduism will say. (...) Do not the Hindus all over the country worship the tree? *Tulasi, bilva, ashwattha* are all sacred to the Hindu.(...) The worship of *Nâg*, the cobra, is prevalent throughout our country. (...) Then, should we term all these devotees and worshippers as 'animists' and declare them as non-Hindus?"[29]

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[27] Asok K. Ghosh and P.N. Hansda: "Encounter between Hindus and Santals", *Journal of Dharma*, April-June 1994, p.194.

[28] Dick Kooiman: *India*, p.23.

[29] M.S. Golwalkar: *Bunch of Thoughts*, p.471-472.

Snake worship, for one, is a major common denominator of Hindu and tribal culture: "Animal deities have been closely associated with major Hindu Gods. The Naga or serpent is an important powerful symbol in the iconography of both Shiva and Vishnu".[30] On the other hand, the ancient use of the term *Nâga* ("snake", but also "naked one") for "tribal, forest-dweller" (as in the names of the forest city Nagpur, the forest area Chhotanagpur and the tribal state Nagaland) indicates that Hindus anciently did see the tribals as a distinctive cultural entity.

A pamphlet presenting the work of the RSS tribal front, the Vanavasi Kalyan Ashram (VKS), puts it this way: "Foreigners have propagated that Forest-Dwellers are not Hindus, that they are 'Animists'. In that case, all Hindus are 'Animists'. Trees, rivers, mountains: Hindus offer worship to them or circumambulate them. In the Vedas, there is Dawn-goddess, Storm-god, Sky-god, Wind-god and such deities. If someone lives among the tribals, he will experience at once that they are good Hindus."[31]

The logo of the Vanavasi Kalyan Ashram shows a tribal with bow and arrow, which is indeed reminiscent of Rama, Drona and other heroes of the Vedic Age. Vedic and Puranic Hinduism started as a form of tribal animism, and have never repudiated these roots altogether.

9.5. Hindu and Christian vs. tribal culture

Against the attempt to put tribal animism and Christianity in one camp (viz. monotheism) and Hindu polytheism in the other, Hindus have proposed ways of counting Hindus and animists as one camp (e.g. polytheism, or native) and Christianity (monotheism c.q. foreign) as the other. It may be pointed out that in some respects, a third scheme applies: Christians and Hindus in one camp, tribal animists in the other. Out of love for the tribals, Verrier Elwin, an ex-missionary who became Jawaharlal Nehru's adviser on tribal affairs, opposed the encroachment on the tribal world by Christians and Hindus alike.

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[30] K.V. Jayaram: "Propitiating the snake", *Hindustan Times*, 13-1-1990. It is commonly assumed that the term *nâga*, along with its cult, was borrowed from the "pre-Indo-European natives"; however, Bernard Sergent (*Genèse de l'Inde*, p.482, n.607) points out, with reference to Manfred Mayrhofer, that *nâga* might correspond quite regularly to Germanic *s-nake*. On the other hand, the *worship* of snakes is definitely rare in Indo-European cultures outside India, hence probably of non-Indo-European origin.

[31] Prasanna Damodar Sapre: *Hamâre Vanavâsî aur Kalyâṇa Ashrama* (Hindi: "Our Forest-Dwellers and the Well-Being Hermitage"), p.25.

It is simply a fact that Hindus and Christians have a lot in common which separates them jointly from the tribals. Among other things, both value sobriety and self-restraint. So, urban upper-caste Hindus as well as Christian missionaries were simply appalled when they got to know the free sexual morality of the tribals, as exemplified by the youth dormitories, where teenagers of both sexes were lodged together to get to know the facts of life.[32] While upsetting the Christian notion that tribals are almost-Christians, this cultural gap between tribal society and "civilization", both Hindu and Christian, also emphasizes the separate identity of tribals as compared to the dominant classes of Hindu society who have interiorized Christian morbidity. Indeed, many Hindus would not accept the tribals as good Hindus precisely for the same reasons why colonial Christians considered certain native populations as "savages".

The Pagan character of tribal religion gives it a common basis with Hinduism and even makes it part of Hinduism if the latter is defined as "Indian Paganism". But this cannot explain away the really existing cleavage between mainstream Hindu society and tribal society. The latter is a lot more "Pagan" in the stereotypical sense, more "natural" than both Sanskritic Hinduism and Christianity, as exemplified by Verrier Elwin's "conversion" to tribal culture coinciding with his embarking on a life of sexual experimentation and improvisation. This is of course why Western neo-Pagans, tired of Christian morality, would generally prefer tribal culture to the formalized and asceticism-minded Hinduism of medieval times. Hinduism has grown away from those elements in its own history which resemble the wilder aspects of tribal culture.

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[32] Vide the influential article by Christoph von Fürer-Haimendorf: "Youth dormitories and community-house in India", *Anthropos*, 1951, p.119-144, referred to e.g. in B. Sergent: *Genèse de l'Inde*, p.32.

9.6. "Adivasi"

Discussion of the religious status and political rights of the tribals is rendered more difficult by the term commonly used to designate them: *âdivâsî*. Christian missionaries and secularists have popularized the belief that this is a hoary self-designation of the tribals (unmindful that this would prove their intimate familiarity with Sanskritic culture, as the term is a pure Sanskrit coinage), e.g.: "These peoples are called adivasis, which means 'first inhabitants'. Like the American continent, India has its Indians."[33]

Contrary to a widespread belief, this term is not indigenous. It is not listed in the 19th-century Sanskrit dictionary of M. Monier-Williams, a zealous Christian who would gladly have obliged the missionaries if only he had been aware of the term. The Sanskrit classics attest the awareness of a separate category of forest-dwellers, but used descriptive terms for them, e.g. *âtavika*, from *atavî*, "forest".

Christian authors feign indignation when such descriptive terms are preferred. Thus, A.J. Philip: "In the lexicon of Hindutva, the word adivasi has disappeared. The Sangh Parivar prefers to call them vanvasis (dwellers of forests or jungles). It is just a step away from calling them junglis (illiterate, uncouth and uncivilised). Thus the fall in the status of a people who take pride in calling themselves the adi (original) people of the land is at once apparent. (.) It is all part of a grand project of rewriting history which the Parivar and its affiliates have ventured into."[34] No, the imposition of the term adivasi during the colonial period was itself an instance of replacing facts of history with an imaginative theory.

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[33] Henk Boon: *India. Mensen, Politiek, Economie, Cultuur.* Novib series, The Hague 1997, p.11.

[34] A.J. Philip: "Hindutva, the lexical way", *Indian Express*, 8.3.99.

The history-rewriting, in A.J. Philip's case, is also in the eye of the beholder. While insisting on the use of the colonial-imposed term adivasi, he manages to give an anti-colonial twist to his story: "The adivasis, whom the anthropologist call the Fourth World or the indigenous people, suffered the first lexical assault when they were brought under the official term Scheduled Tribes".[35] But it was the British themselves, with their race theories, who had redefined the tribals as the "indigenous races", and who had even introduced the concept of "tribe" as distinct from "caste" (after an initial period when they had used the term interchangealy, e.g. "the Brahmin tribe").

The colonial term *aboriginal*, "pre-colonial native", has been indigenized in India in the 19th century through its literal translation *âdivâsî*. The term *aboriginal* had gained currency in the "New World", where it made good sense from a European viewpoint: a white colonist (or an imported black slave) was a "new inhabitant", and a Native American, Native Australian or Maori was an "original inhabitant". This term says one thing about its referent, viz. that he is not an immigrant, and another about its non-referent, viz. that he is an immigrant, a colonizer.

The excluded ones, the non-Adivasis, all the urban and advanced agricultural communities, suddenly found themselves labelled as immigrants who had colonized India and chased the aboriginals to the most inaccessible places. The message of the colonial term Adivasi was that the urban elites who were waging a struggle for independence, could not claim to be the rightful owners of the country anymore than the British could. Likewise, it served to present Hinduism, the religion named after India, as a foreign imposition. The only non-tribals considered aboriginal were the Untouchables, supposedly the native dark-skinned proletariat in the Apartheid system imposed by the white Aryan invaders to preserve their race.

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[35] A.J. Philip: "Hindutva, the lexical way", *Indian Express*, 8.3.99.

This racial view of history was nothing but a projection of 19th-century racist colonial perceptions onto ancient Indian history, but it was well-entrenched and put to good colonial use. Thus, during the 1935 Parliament debates on the Government of India Act, Sir Winston Churchill opposed any policy tending towards decolonization on the following ground: "We have as much right to be in India as anyone there, except perhaps for the Depressed Classes [= the SC/STs], who are the native stock."[36]

Many NGO activists and other well-intentioned people in the West believe that their support to separatism and other political movements of the Indian "Aboriginals" is a bold move against oppressive intruders. In fact, most so-called liberation movements in India are gravely tainted by their origin as instruments of oppression by the latest intruder, the European colonizer: in order to weaken the national freedom movement, minorities were sought out or even created to serve as allies of the new rulers and keep the national movement down. The Muslim League, the Dravidian Justice Party (forerunner of the Tamil-separatist Dravida Kazhagam), the Ambedkarite movement, they were all created with British help and nurtured by the British with a view to weakening the freedom movement. Even the Communist Party was helped against nationalist forces.[37] The imaginary division of the Indians in "natives" and "invaders", though originally an innocent outgrowth of the then-fashionable race theories, was soon instrumentalized in the service of the same strategy of colonial control.

It may be recalled that when Hernan Cortes conquered Mexico, he first made an alliance with some of the "native" peoples "oppressed" by the imperial Aztecs, who had indeed "invaded" Mexico from the North a few centuries earlier. This way, the destroyer of the native American polity and culture made his entry as a liberator of the natives from oppression by intruders. The designation of the Indian tribals as "aboriginals" was a part of a similar strategy. Can we blame Hindus when they don't consider this nativist discourse all that innocent? The fact that Cortes used true history while the British used at best speculative history, is relatively immaterial: nurturing and exploiting a psychology of grievances against the real or imagined "invaders" is what counted.

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[36] Reproduced in C.H. Philips ed.: *Select Documents on the History of India and Pakistan*, part IV, p.315.

[37] About the Justice Party, founded in Madras in 1916 under British patronage, vide S. Saraswathi: *Minorities in Madras State*, and especially P. Rajaraman: *The Justice Party*.

Many people use the term "Adivasi" quite innocently, but the term is political through and through. Its great achievement is that it has firmly fixed the division of the Indians in "natives" and "invaders" in the collective consciousness, on a par with the division in natives or aboriginals and the immigrant population in America and Australia. Thus, an indologist specializing in tribal culture said to me, off-hand: "The *Âdivâsîs* are the original people of India—well of course, that is precisely what the word *âdivâsî* means." The parallel with the American and Australian situations is driven home, e.g. in the title of a booklet on India published by the Dutch and Belgian administrations for development cooperation: "Adivasi, Indianen van India" (Dutch: "India's Indians").[38] As if the term were not a deliberate modern construction but an ancient witness to an ancient history of aboriginal dispossession by Dravidian and Aryan "invaders".

Anglicized Hindus, too, have interiorized the parallel White/Amerindian = Hindu/Adivasi.[39] However, no conscious Hindu now accepts the ideologically weighted term Adivasi, much to the dismay of those who espouse the ideological agenda implied in the term, viz. the detachment of the tribals from Hindu society and the delegitimation of Hinduism as India's native religion. Thus, the *Times of India* complains: "In the Indian context, it is sad to note that, despite the affirmative action promised by the Constitution for the Scheduled Tribes and despite the appellation of *adivasi* (original inhabitants) being used for them, the government still does not accept that tribals are the indigenous peoples of India. In fact, it is not without significance that the BJP (...) prefers to refer patronisingly to tribal peoples as *vanvasis* (forest dwellers) rather than *adivasis*."[40]

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[38] Dick Kooiman: *India* (Novib/NCOS), p.21. Likewise, in the French geographical and anthropological periodical *Géo*, ca.1992, the tribals of Bastar were called *"les Indiens de l'Inde"*, "India's Indians".

[39] A Bengali professor in the USA told me his story. When he left India for the USA, his mother made him promise her that he would only marry an Indian woman. He contracted a love marriage with a Native American, a.k.a. "Indian", so, in a way, he kept his promise. But his family back home asked him: "What? Did you marry a *Santal*?", spontaneously equating the Santal tribals west of Kolkata with the Native Americans.

The assumption that the term "forest-dweller" is condescending is simply not correct from the viewpoint of the forest-dwellers themselves, who hold their forests and the concomitant life-style in high esteem, just as the Vedic people did.[41] Likewise, Mahatma Gandhi's indigenous term for the tribals, Girijan or "hill people", far from being a condescending exonym, is actually the self-designation of many communities in India. Many Dravidian-speaking tribes have names derived from *ku*- or *malai*-, meaning "hill, mountain", e.g. Kurukh, Malto, and of course the non-tribal Malayali.

Historian and anti-Hindutva activist Gyanendra Pandey writes: "A special number of the RSS journal *Panchjanya*, devoted to the 'tribal' peoples of India and published in March 1982, is significantly titled *'Veer vanvasi ank'*. The use of the term *'vanvasi'* (forest- or jungle-dwellers) in place of the designation *'adivasi'*, which had come to be the most commonly used term among social scientists and political activists talking about tribal groups in India, is not an accident. Adivasi means original inhabitants, a status that the Hindu spokespersons of today are loath to accord to the tribal population of India."[42]

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[40] "Stepsons of the Soil", *Times of India* editorial, 20-11-1993.

[41] About ancient Hindu culture as largely a silvan culture, see Thomas Parkhill: *The Forest Setting in Hindu Epics.*

Gyanendra Pandey builds on the accomplished fact of the widespread use of the ideological term Adivasi,—which is "not an accident" either, witness its "common use" by "political activists". In fact, not just "Hindu spokespersons" but everyone who cultivates the scientific temper would reject a term which carries the load of an entirely unproven, politically motivated theory, viz. that the tribals are "the" (i.e. the only) original inhabitants of India. Nobody is "loath to accord to the tribal population the status of original inhabitants", certainly not the Hindu nationalists.[43] But every objective observer would reject the effective implication of the term Adivasi, viz. that the non-tribals are *not* original inhabitants, on a par with the white colonizers who decimated the Native Americans.

9.7 International voices on tribal aboriginality

In this debate, the Indian Government (*any* Indian Government) has always upheld the oneness of the Indian population, and rejected divisive concepts like "Aboriginal" as opposed to "Invader". The UN Working Group on Indigenous Populations in Geneva has been looking into the claim that the Scheduled Tribes and Scheduled Castes of India are the indigenous population of India, for indeed, some tribal spokesmen have been pushing for recognition by the United Nations as "the original inhabitants of India". Foremost among them was Prof. A.K. Kisku, secretary-general of the Indian Council of Indigenous and Tribal Peoples (ICITP), which called itself a "non-political, non-communal, non-governmental human rights umbrella organization to campaign for the protection of the *âdivâsîs*—i.e. indigenous population—covering the entire subcontinent", and told the world that "with its 60 million indigenous and tribal people, India has the largest indigenous population in the world (200 million)".[44]

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[42] G. Pandey: "Hindus and Others: the Militant Hindu Construction", *Economical and Political Weekly*, 28/12/1991, p.3003.

[43] Shrikant Talageri (*Aryan Invasion Theory and Indian Nationalism*) argues for the rather static view of history that all the present-day language groups in India have covered roughly their present territory since pre-Harappan days. In my opinion this is incorrect, but it shows at any rate that he is not loath to recognize the tribals as indigenous populations, along with the non-tribals.

Both the Indian Government and the Hindu nationalist movement consequently watch any assertion of tribal separateness with some concern, because the road from cultural to political and territorial separatism may be a short one; and also because they know that the outside world tends to sympathize with the demands of "aboriginals". Of course, since states and not communities are the units constituting the UNO, India can always block UNO steps demanded by tribal spokesmen, but it could lose at least the intellectual debate, so it presented a solid argumentation. On 31 July 1991 (and similarly on several other occasions) the India delegate at the Working Groups session, Prabhu Dayal, refuted the claims made on behalf of the tribals by Prof. Kisku.[45]

However, when we look into Prof. Kisku's argumentation, we find that he is not even trying to prove his crucial point, viz. that the tribals are indigenous while the rest are not. The claim is made that "the Tribals are the autochtonous people of the land", but no argument is given except that they "are believed to be the earliest settlers in the Indian peninsula" and that they "are generally called the *adivasis*, implying original inhabitants".[46] He fails to prove that all non-tribals are non-aboriginals, but uses the term which encapsulates that theory as proof of the selfsame theory. All by itself, the neologism *âdivâsî* constitutes one of the most successful disinformation campaigns in modern history.

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[44] In Prof. Kisku: "Urgent Appeal to Adivasis Abroad", *India* (bimonthly of Shanti Darshan Belgo-Indian Association), April 1992. Kisku was a member of the Lok Sabha in 1966-77 and a Minister in Mrs. Gandhi's Cabinet in 1968-74.

[45] It is, at any rate, not at all uncommon to read in Western media about tribal areas as countries "occupied by India". Thus, Wilco Brinkman, writing of Manipur ("Manipur, een mini-staat", *India Nu*, Utrecht, Jan. 1997), speaks of an "Indian invasion" and about rice being "exported from Manipur to India", implying that India is a foreign country, and of "Indian colonial oppression".

[46] Quoted in *Dalit Voice*, 1-6-1992.

Against Kisku's claim, Government spokesman Mr. Dayal argued that the term "indigenous peoples" cannot be equated with Scheduled Tribes and Scheduled Castes. He concentrated on showing that today there is no clear-cut separation between tribal and non-tribal segments of the population, quoting the eminent sociologist Prof. André Béteille: "In this country, groups which correspond closely to the anthropologists' conception of tribes have lived in long association with communities of an entirely different type. Except in a few areas, it is very difficult to come across communities which retain all their pristine tribal character. In fact, most such tribal groups show in varying degrees elements of continuity with the larger society of India (...) In India hardly any of the tribes exists as a separate society and they have all been absorbed, in varying degrees, into the wider society of India. The on-going process of absorption is not recent but dates back to the most ancient times"[47]

Prof. Béteille had found that "ethnically speaking, most of the tribes in present-day India share their origins with the neighbouring non-tribal population. India has been a melting-pot of races and ethnic groups, and historians and anthropologists find it difficult to arrange the various distinct cultural, ethnic and linguistic groups in the chronological sequence of their appearance in the sub-continent."[48]

Concluding his argumentation, Mr. Dayal said: "In case the various criteria of indigenous populations were to be selectively applied to the Indian context, at least 300 or 400 million people could come within its ambit. I would therefore reiterate my government's view that *tribals in India do not constitute what is understood by the term 'indigenous populations'.*"[49] So far, the UN Working Group on Indigenous Populations has always accepted the Indian Government's view, which of course is also the Hindu view.

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[47] Reported in *Dalit Voice*, 16-4-1992. Remark the falsity of the report's title: "André Béteille dupes SC/STs: says they are not indigenous peoples". Prof. Béteille never wrote that the tribals are non-indigenous, he merely refused to exclude non-tribals from the "indigenous" category.

[48] *Dalit Voice*, 16-4-1992. *Dalit Voice* claims that Prof. Béteille had herewith "taken the ruling class line of argument".

In my opinion, the issue is clinched by Prof. Béteille in another article. He contrasts the category of caste, slightly reinforced and rigidified under colonial rule but otherwise thoroughly familiar to the Indian population since millennia, with the very new concept of tribe: "Every Hindu knew not only that he belonged to a particular caste but also that others belonged to other castes of whose respective places in a broader scheme of things he had some idea, whether vague or stereotyped. Hardly anything corresponding to this exited in the case of those we know today as tribes. The consciousness of the distinct and separate identity of all the tribes of India taken as a whole is a modern consciousness, brought into being by the colonial state and confirmed by its successor after Independence."[50]

To traditional Hinduism, tribes are simply forest-based castes or communities (with both "caste" and "tribe" rendering the same Sanskrit term *jâti*), in closer or more tenuous contact with the Great Tradition. There never was a clear cleavage between Hindu castes and animist tribes, there only were communities geographically and culturally closer or less close to the Vedic backbone of Hindu civilization. Some were less Vedic yet socially integrated, viz. the low castes, others were less Vedic and socially more isolated, viz. the castes now labelled "tribes".

But even the latter never had the consciousness of belonging to a separate "tribal" type of population. Just as the Ahir caste or the Kayasth caste or the Chamar caste was aware of it distinctive caste identity, "the Santhal had a sense their own identity as Santhals; the Garos of theirs as Garos; and the Todas of their as Todas",—but none was aware of a collective "tribal" identity, much less of an "aboriginal" identity.[51]

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[49] *Dalit Voice*, 16-4-1992.

[50] André Béteille: "Colonial construction of tribe" (an old column of his in *Times of India*), *Chronicle of Our Time*, p.187.

Not one of the Indian tribes was entirely untouched by the influence of the Vedic-Puranic Great Tradition. This is one of the reasons why the relationship between Hinduism and any Indian "tribe" is different from the relationship between Hinduism and tribal cultures in other continents. Even the tribal cultures genetically unrelated to Vedic civilization were dimly integrated in the Hindu world which spanned the whole of India.

Tribes from the Kafirs of Afghanistan to the Gonds of South-Central India have taken starring roles in the resistance of the native society against the Muslim onslaught. If the Bhil boy Ekalavya of Mahabharata (I.31-54) fame could seek out the princely martial arts trainer Drona as his archery teacher, even the terrible treatment he received from Drona (for reasons unrelated to Ekalavya's social origins) cannot nullify the implication that the Bhil tribe habitually interacted with the Vedic Bharata clan. Those who use the Eklavya story against Hinduism do not know or ignore the fact that Eklavya is mentioned twice (II.37.47; II.44.21) as one of the great kings who was invited and given great hospitality in Yudhisthara's Rajasusya Yajna at Indraprastha. Kautilya mentions tribal (*aṭvî*) battalions in Hindu royal armies.[52] Rama, of course, relied on his *Vânara* (forest-dweller) allies to fight Ravana. The tribals may have lived on the periphery, but it was still within the horizon of Hindu society.

9.8. But are they really aboriginal?

Given the Hindutva priority of uniting all "Hindus" and not offending the sensibilities of any of the targeted groups, a hard question which the above controversy ought to raise, is never asked: but *are* the "Adivasis" really aboriginal? Given the racial mixing, they would be as indigenous as anyone, at least biologically (and the same is true for the speakers of Indo-Aryan), but what about their distinctive identities, starting with their languages? Tribal activism and separatism is strongest in Jharkhand and the North-East, but about the origins of the tribals predominant in these two areas, leading anthropologists have a sobering message:

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[51] André Béteille: "Colonial construction of tribe", *Chronicle of Our Time*, p.189.

[52] Kautilya: *The Arthashastra* 9:2:13-20, Penguin edition, p.685.

"Whereas the now Dravidian-speaking tribals of Central and South India can be considered to be descendents of the original inhabitants of India, who gave up their original languages in favour of Dravidian, Tibeto-Chinese speaking tribals (Northeast India) and Austro-Asiatic speaking ones (East India) immigrated into India since ancient historical times. Most likely they came in several waves from Southern China (Tibeto-Chinese speakers) and from Southeast Asia (Austro-Asiatic speakers) respectively. Without doubt these immigrating groups met with ancient Indian populations, which were living already on their migration routes, and thus one cannot exclude some cultural and also genetic contacts between immigrants and original inhabitants of India, at least at some places."[53]

The Oraons of Chhotanagpur have a tradition describing their wanderings from the western coast along the Narmada river to their present habitat on the Ranchi plateau, where they pushed the Mundari-speaking tribes to the eastern part of the plateau.[54] This fits in with the theory that the Dravidian language family as a whole entered India from Baluchistan and further West.[55] Likewise, Bastar in Central India "was probably populated by Kolari-speaking Austro-Asiatic tribes (...) It is surmised that the Gonds who now live there immigrated from South India and chased out the said Austro-Asiatic groups."[56]

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[53] H. Walter et al.: "Investigations on the variability of blood group polymorphisms among sixteen tribal populations from Orissa, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra, India", in *Zeitschrift flr Morphologie und Anthropologie*, Band 79 Heft 1 (1992).

[54] J. Van Troy s.j.: *The Prehistoric Context of the Coming of the Mundas to the Ranchi Plateau. A Review.* In *Sevartham* vol.15, 1990, p.27 ff.

As for the Austro-Asiatic tribes themselves (Ho, Santal, Munda), pushed out from some areas by Dravidian-speaking Gonds and Oraons, they too have a history of immigration. Their languages, along with Nicobarese, belong to the Austro-Asiatic language family, of which the dominant members are Khmer and Vietnamese. Its original heartland was probably the Bronze age culture of the 3rd millennium BC in Thailand, but it stretched as far as central China.[57] There are archaeologically attested connections between these cultures, as pointed out by Prof. H.D. Sankalia: "The Eastern Neolithic Culture of India was partly received from the Far East."[58] Indeed: "The general assumption is still that the Munda languages came to India from the east via Assam and Burma."[59] The most recent findings in both linguistics and anthropology confirm the East-Asian origin of the Munda family of tribes.[60]

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[55] As asserted in the *Encyclopaedia of Tamil Literature*, vol.1, p.45, and by A.L. Basham in his introduction to Deshpande & Hook: *Aryan and non-Aryan in South Asia* (1979). This is supported also by David McAlpin's theory (argued in Deshpande & Hook: *op.cit.*) of "Elamo-Dravidian", originating in southern Iran. This theory, as well as the "evidence" for Western origins of Dravidian constituted by a Dravidian (Brahui) speech pocket in Baluchistan, is rejected by Bernard Sergent (*Genèse de l'Inde*, p.45-84), but he offers other indications for a non-Indian origin of Dravidian, linking it with Uralic and even some African languages (though, if correct, these data could equally support a scenario of Dravidian expansion *from* India).

[56] Jan van Alphen: "Adivasi", *India* (Brussels), May 1993, p.31.

[57] The Chinese language has a number of Austro-Asiatic loan-words, probably including the "cyclical" characters, two series (of 10 and of 12) of numerals used for counting hours, compass directions etc.

[58] Quoted by J. Van Troy: "Coming of the Mundas", *Sevartham*, 1990, p.27 ff.

[59] S. Fuchs: "Priests and Magicians in Aboriginal India", *Studia Missionalia*, vol.22 (1973), p.219.

André Béteille confirms this: "Taking India as a whole, it would be absurd to designate as indigenous only the tribal population, leaving out all the others. As a matter of historical fact, several of the contemporary tribes of India moved into the country across its northeastern frontier long after the areas into which they had moved had been settled by peasants who are not now designated as tribals. The Mizos certainly are not more indigenous to the areas they inhabit than the Gujaratis are to Gujarat."[61]

By all accounts, the Tibeto-Burmese "Adivasis" in the North-East are among India's most recent ethnic immigrants, whose presence in India may not go back more than a thousand years. Not important in itself, but the question whether the tribals themselves are truly "original inhabitants" is the logical outcome of their own (admittedly tutored) choice to classify India's inhabitants as "aboriginals" and "invaders". The question may sound sacrilegious to those who champion the Adivasi label, but it is their own stand that makes it pertinent. At any rate, the historical data do not support the division of India's population in "aboriginal tribals" and "non-tribal invaders". This finding ought to help bring the over-dramatized question of the tribals' religious identity back to its real proportions.

9.9. Hinduism, a "pre-Aryan" religion

There is one Hindu Revivalist author who has methodically argued against the view (implied in the term *âdivâsî*) that the tribals have one religion, which is indigenous, and non-tribals another, the Vedic religion, which was imported. Shrikant Talageri puts it in the context of the Aryan Invasion Theory, the corner-stone of the division of Indians into "natives" and "invaders".[62] A discussion of the rightness or wrongness of this theory (rejected by many Hindu nationalists) would take us too far here, but Talageri's point is precisely that even if we accept the theory, most elements in Hinduism are commonly assumed (by scholars accepting the theory) to have been borrowed from the natives.

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[60] For an admirable synthesis of the evidence, see B. Sergent: *Genèse de l'Inde*, p.85-96.

[61] André Béteille: "Colonial construction of tribe", *Chronicle of Our Time*, p.189.

Talageri proposes: "Let us examine whether, *as per the Aryan Invasion Theory itself*, Hinduism is an 'Aryan' religion. (...) Suniti Kumar Chatterji has listed some of the features of Hinduism, which are supposed to be of 'pre-Aryan' origin (...) As a study of the material presented therein will show, almost every aspect of Hinduism as we know it today, certainly every feature central to the religion, is supposed to be of 'pre-Aryan' origin."[63] The criterion applied, not by Talageri but by established scholars like S.K. Chatterji, whom he quotes, is mostly whether a motif or practice is attested in the Rigveda and in related Indo-European traditions, esp. the Avesta, the Germanic, Celtic and Slavic cultures, pre-Classical Rome and Greece, and even the reviving Paganism of the Baltic peoples (the Latvian *Dievturiba* and the Lithuanian *Romuva* religion).[64] Anything not attested in these Indo-European traditions is supposed to be "pre-Aryan", or to summarize Talageri's detailed enumeration:

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[62] For a re-examination of the Aryan Invasion Theory from a Hindu angle, vide N.S. Rajaram & D. Frawley: *Vedic Aryans*; or G. Feuerstein, D. Frawley & S. Kak: *In Search of the Cradle of Civilization.*

[63] S. Talageri: *Aryan Invasion Theory and Indian Nationalism*, p.34, with reference to S.K. Chatterji's contribution to R.C. Majumdar, ed.: *The Vedic Age*, Ch.8; emphasis in the original.

[64] See S.K. Chatterji: *Balts and Aryans* (1968). Latvia and Lithuania were christianized as late as the 15th century, and never completely. The last *Romuva* temple was destroyed in ca. 1790, and elements of the religion survived in the countryside, now to make a come-back. The funeral rites for the late Prof. Marija Gimbutas were according to *Romuva* tradition. The religion acknowledges its close ties with Vedic Hinduism, and in the diaspora (as in Chicago, where I met its regional spokesman Audrius Dudzila), *Romuva* adherents regularly participate in Hindu festivals.

1. The entire system of idol-worship, whether of the lingam, of 'rude blocks of stone' with eyes painted on them, or of sculptured images of stone, metal or wood; including the procedure of worship, viz. treating the idols as living beings (washing them, feeding them etc.), offering them flowers and fruits, waving lamps and incense before them, performing music and dance before them; and the construction of permanent houses for them, temples with sacred tanks, chariots for annual processions, pilgrimages etc.

2. The application of coloured pastes on the idols and on the skin of the worshipper, including the saffron colour and the forehead-mark (*tilak*), two of the most basic symbols of Hinduism.

3. The concept of transmigration of souls.

4. The enumeration of the days by moon phases (*tithi*), on which the ritualistic calendar (*Panchâṅga*) is based.

5. Zoomorphic aspects of Hinduism: sacredness of animals, worship of elephant-God Ganesha and monkey-God Hanuman, concept of Lord Vishnu incarnating in the form of a fish, tortoise, boar, lion; the animal vehicles of the gods (Shiva's bull, Vishnu's eagle, Durga's lion etc.).

6. Most Gods actually worshipped are considered 'pre-Aryan' (certified Aryan Gods like Indra, corresponding to Zeus/Jupiter/Thor/Perkunas, are hardly worshipped).[65]

7. Many Puranic myths are considered Sanskrit adaptations of "indigenous" myths.

8. It is obvious that all the sacred places of India could not have been imported by the "Aryans".

9. All the typically Indian materials used in Hindu rituals have obviously been employed in emulation of native usage.

Talageri concludes: "After all this, how much remains of Hinduism which can be classified as 'Aryan'? According to the Aryan invasion theory itself, Hinduism is practically a 'pre-

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[65] Brahma, the truly Brahmanic (hence supposedly "Aryan") member of the *trimûrti* (i.e. Brahma, half-Aryan Vishnu and reputedly indigenous Shiva) is worshipped in only one temple, in Pushkar, Rajasthan, in the original cradle-land of Vedic culture.

Aryan' (...) religion adopted by the 'Aryans'."[66] This point is also conceded by the more enlightened among the Aryan invasion theorists, e.g.: "Hinduism has not been 'imported' by the Aryans", in the sense that the latter's religion differed considerably from what is now known as Hinduism.[67]

In general outline, this is hard to refute. But of course, the established proponents of the Aryan Invasion Theory may be wrong in their tracing of cultural motifs to Aryan or non-Aryan sources. Many religious themes assumed to have been borrowed from the "pre-Aryan natives" are now recognized by a new generation of Indo-Europeanists as part of the common "Aryan" heritage. Thus, Bernard Sergent presents fresh evidence to equate Vishnu with the Germanic god *Vîdharr* and Shiva with the Greek god *Dionysos*.[68] Even so, that still leaves a large part of Hindu lore to be traced to aboriginal sources.

9.10. Tribal belief in reincarnation

For an instance of a Hindu doctrine claimed as indigenous, consider the belief in reincarnation. Though apparently attested among the ancient Celts, among the Pythagoreans (who acknowledged Oriental influence) and in Virgil's *Aeneis*, it is not in evidence in the Vedas (thought it may be implied in some episodes or mantras), and is therefore considered a pre-Aryan import into Hinduism. Among the Indo-Europeans including the Vedic Aryans, different beliefs about the afterlife may have co-existed, but the *communis opinio* is that the Vedic Aryans adopted the belief in reincarnation from Indian "natives". According to anti-Brahmin authors, the wily Aryan Brahmins then forged this borrowed belief into a weapon to suppress the natives by means of the caste system.[69] It is, at any rate, widely believed that "the caste system in India has always been officially justified and legitimized by the doctrine of karma. Someone's birth in a higher or a lower caste or as an outcaste was the consequence of the law of karma."[70]

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[66] S. Talageri: *Aryan Invasion Theory and Indian Nationalism*, p.38.

[67] Henk Boon: *India*, Novib series, The Hague 1997, p.13. It is incidentally, reported there (p.14-15) that the Portuguese word *casta*, "guild", was first applied to the indian *jâtis* by Garcia de Orta in 1563. Otherwise, the book makes all the conventional claims about caste, such as this popular howler (p.17): "For the untouchables and other backwards, it was very difficult to escape the stranglehold of the caste system. (...) From the 11th century, however, more opportunities came about for breaking out of the system, when Islamic peoples (...) streamed into South Asia.(...) Many Hindus converted to Islam, more for reasons of caste than by force from the authorities."

[68] B. Sergent: *Genèse de l'Inde*, p.402. Talageri himself (*Aryan Invasion Theory and Indian Nationalism*, p.205 ff.) tries to prove the same point regarding the Indo-Aryan vocabulary: that words usually explained as loans from "aboriginal" languages have a demonstrable Indo-European etymology, e.g. *ibha*, "elephant", could be related to Latin *ebur*, "ivory".

Fact is that the belief in reincarnation, considered by some as a defining characteristic of Hinduism, is also found among Indian tribals, though with philosophical variations and co-existing with other beliefs. Thus, Robert Parkin writes that the Munda tribals believe in reincarnation, but with an "absence of an ethical component", so that "it is the manner of one's death, not the worth of one's life, that is the qualification for rebirth".[71] For the Mundas, "reincarnation is of course an object of desire here, not of dread".[72] Clearly, then, they did not borrow it from Buddhism or Puranic Hinduism, which impose a moralistic and negative view of rebirth on this basic belief.

There is no reason to attribute the belief in reincarnation among tribals to Brahminical influence. In his survey of reincarnation beliefs around the world, the Dutch scholar Hans Ten Dam reports that in all continents, people have believed in reincarnation, e.g. more than a hundred Black

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[69] E.g. André van Lysebeth: *Tantra, le culte de la féminité*, introduction.

[70] J. Verkuyl: *De New Age Beweging*, p.71.

[71] Robert Parkin: *The Munda of Central India*, p.222. This view is also known in Sikhism and Buddhism, see e.g. Harcharan Singh Sobti: "Bhagat Trilochan: A Study of the Last Wish and the Next Birth", in K.K. Mittal: *Karma and Rebirth*, p.199-207.

[72] Robert Parkin: *The Munda of Central India*, p.222.

African nations.[73] Many of these peoples were unrelated, and stumbled upon the notion of reincarnation independently, without needing the pre-Aryan Indians to tell them about it. As Ram Swarup argues, the belief in reincarnation "is found among people who are called 'primitive' as well as those who are called 'civilized' (...) among the Eskimos, Australians, Melanesians, the Poso Alfur of Celebes in Indonesia, among Algonquians, Bantus, (...) the Pythagoreans and the teachers of Orphic mystery (...) In short, the doctrine has the support of the spiritual intuition of most mankind, ancient or modern."[74]

Conversely, some scholars claim that the notion of karma and of reincarnation has not been attested among the early Dravidian populations of India: "Before the coming of the Aryan ideas, the Tamils did not believe in reincarnation. Rather, like many archaic peoples, they had shadowy and inconsistent ideas of what happens to the spirits of the dead."[75] Till today, *karma* and reincarnation are not as pervasive in Hindu culture as textbooks suggest, e.g. the late A.K. Ramanujan testifies: "But when I looked at hundreds of Kannada tales, I couldn't find a single tale that used *karma* as a motif or motive."[76] Among Tamil villagers, *karma* was found to alternate with *talaividi* ("headwriting"), one's fate imprinted at birth, unrelated with past lives and not logically compatible with *karma*.[77]

So, both in Hindu and in tribal cultures, we have a variety of opinions about the afterlife, including several versions of the doctrine of reincarnation. Certain ideas are so general that trying to identify them with ethnic groups is unconvincing when not downright funny. Thus, I once heard an Indologist of feminist persuasion argue that Samkhya philosophy, which divides the universe into a multiplicity of spirits (*Purusha*, masculine) and a single "nature" or material world (*Prakriti*, feminine), must have been thought up by a "pre-Aryan" culture because it betrays a matriarchal polyandrous viewpoint.

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[73] H. Ten Dam: *Ring van Licht*, p.45 ff.

[74] Ram Swarup: *Hindu View of Christianity and Islam*, p.47.

[75] George L. Hart, III: "The Theory of Reincarnation among the Tamils", in Wendy Doniger: *Karma and Rebirth in Classical Indian Traditions*, p.116.

[76] A.K. Ramanujan: "Is there an Indian way of thinking?", in McKim Marriott: *India through Hindu Categories*, p.44.

[77] A.K. Ramanujan: "Is there an Indian way of thinking?", in McKim Marriott: *India through Hindu Categories*, p.44, with reference to research by Sheryl Daniel. The belief in an imprint at birth is all the more compatible with astrology, which sees the stellar configuration as the agent of this imprint of fate. This basic postulate is again difficult to reconcile with karma, yet astrology is immensely popular among Hindus.

Likewise, Heinrich Zimmer, an exponent of this ethnic division of Indian thought, is described by Frits Staal as "the author of an original but one-sided description of Indian philosophies—based on an interpretation not free of racial prejudice: according to Zimmer, there is in Indian thought an opposition between the monist Vedanta philosophy which stems from the Vedic Aryans and the realistic dualism of Jainism and Buddhism which he links with the 'original' Dravidian India."[78] Staal dismisses this as "romantic ideas not verified in reality".

Within the ethnically fairly homogeneous Greek world, we see a wealth of different philosophies spring up in just a matter of centuries, from Anaximander to Zeno; it stands to reason that the much larger Hindu society also produced different world-views and different religious practices without having to borrow them from non-Hindu cultures. Both in Hindu and in tribal culture, several views of afterlife and reincarnation coexist, and the two sets partially overlap. So far, the distribution of different views of reincarnation in Hindu society and in tribal-animist society is not such as to indicate a clean religious cleavage between those two.

9.11. Do tribals have caste?

As we have seen, numerous observers take caste division to be a defining trait of Hinduism. Shrikant Talageri accepts the historical (i.e. non-essentialist) entanglement of Hinduism in the caste system: "The caste system (...) is, in its nastier aspects, the bane of Hinduism and Indian society. This system, however, is a social system, and is not really a central aspect of Hinduism, although vested interests down the centuries have strived, with great success, to identify it with Hinduism."[79]

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[78] F. Staal: *Zin en Onzin*, p.15.

Until recently, Hindu upper-caste interests were most insistent on justifying caste observance as a Hindu religious duty. But now, the situation is just the reverse: "It is a feature of Hindu society which every genuine Hindu and Hindu nationalist organisation (like the RSS) has sought to wipe out or at least to neutralise; and which every Leftist and secularist politician and intellectual, and Muslim and Christian force, has tried to strengthen and perpetuate".[80] Now, every anti-Hindu author tries his utmost best to pin Hinduism down on the caste system, and conversely, every other religion competing with Hinduism for prestige and for souls describes itself as anti-caste and egalitarian.

To maximize the difference between Hindus and tribals, it is routinely said that "the tribals, unlike the Hindus, have equality and no caste system". This fits in with the trend that Aboriginals all over the world are redefining their own cultural heritage in terms of the "noble savage", the idealized views which Romantic Westerners had projected onto them. Thus, the *Gaia Atlas of First Peoples* quotes one "Pat Dodson, aborigine", as saying: "In traditional Aboriginal society, no one person was more important than another—all were parts of a whole. Growth and stature were measured by contribution, participation and accountability."[81] This may, in his case, be the truth, but the apologetic element in this trend is hard to miss.

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[79] S. Talageri: *Aryan Invasion Theory and Indian Nationalism*, p.40.

[80] S. Talageri: *Aryan Invasion Theory and Indian Nationalism*, p.40. There is truth in this statement but there are some exceptions, e.g. Jawaharlal Nehru, the godfather of secularism, made no compromise with casteism, then marginally promoted by Socialists like Ram Manohar Lohia.

[81] Julian Burger: *The Gaia Atlas of First Peoples*, p.50.

Some tribes (especially the most primitive ones, with little functional differentiation) may have come closer to this egalitarian ideal than others, but in general, we can question this assertion on several counts. Equality is a very modern concept, and we may doubt that there exists a norm of "equality" even within a tribe, within a clan, within a family. Moreover, even without hierarchical ranking there can be a division in endogamous groups, i.e. castes; or in Indian terms, endogamous *jâtis* though without *varṇa* ranks.

The world over, tribal populations observe various kinds of caste distinctions. Thus, concerning tribals on the Pacific islands: "In the Mariami group it was the common belief that only the nobles were endowed with an immortal soul, and a nobleman who married a girl of the people was punished with death. In Polynesia the commoners were looked upon by the nobility as a different species of beings. Hence in the higher ranks the marriage was concluded only with persons of corresponding positions; and if in Tahiti, a woman of [rank] chose an inferior person as a husband, the children he had by her were killed."[82] Among the natives of Fiji, too, "a strict hierarchy, a kind of caste system, regulates all of village life".[83]

So, these Polynesian tribals had endogamous groups in a hierarchical relation ("nobility" and "commoners"). The relation between them was neither more egalitarian nor more flexible than that between Hindu castes, on the contrary: marriage outside the caste was not punished with mere expulsion, as happens among Brahmins, but with death.

For another example, we may turn to Congo, where the Batwa or Pygmees coexist with the Baoto, who settled in their land about two thousand years ago: "From this violent clash resulted a modus vivendi which persists till today. The division of roles is contained in unwritten laws. While the Baoto live in the village centre, the Batwa live in the periphery (...) The Batwa used to serve as village guardsmen (...) All kinds of taboos colour the relations between the communities. Batwa and Baoto cannot use the same washing-place, Baoto don't touch food prepared by Batwa, mixed marriages are absolutely prohibited. It has nothing to do with social justice, but these relations certainly are stable."[84] Unequal ranking, endogamy and untouchability: all the elements allegedly typical of Hindu society have sprung up in the heart of tribal Africa without any "Aryan" influence.

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[82] S.V. Ketkar: *History of Caste*, p.29.

[83] Jan De Mets: "Fiji's choice", *Markant* (Antwerp), 13-10-1994.

Endogamy was once a world-wide practice, and there is no reason to assume that Indian tribes are an exception. Yet, people ignore the caste nature of certain social structures even when describing them, simply because the idea that the tribals are caste-free egalitarians has become so entrenched. Witness the following authentic juxtaposition: among Indian tribals, "marriages take place strictly within the tribe and any form of caste system is unknown", according to Dick Kooiman.[85] What this says is effectively: "the tribe is strictly endogamous and endogamous groups are unknown". Yes, the tribe knows no subdivisions in endogamous groups, but that is because the tribe itself is the endogamous unit.

Hindutva authors have done little to correct this view by showing that a kind of caste consciousness is equally pervasive in tribal and in Hindu society, probably because of their eagerness to de-emphasize caste as a defining aspect of Hinduism. All the same, the job has been done, and well done, by anthropologists and Christian missionaries. We quote a brief sample. Christoph von Fürer-Haimendorf writes about the Khova tribe in the North-East: "Their social organization is based on a system of exogamous clans distributed over all the ten villages. The tribe is strictly endogamous, and there is no intermarriage with any neighbouring tribe".[86] Likewise in Central India, the Gonds of Bastar have rules of endogamy and even observe untouchability (now waning).[87]

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[84] Erik Raspoet: "Scheutist in Kongo", *De Morgen*, 20-10-2001.

[85] Dick Kooiman: *India*, p.22.

[86] C. von Fürer-Haimendorf: *Tribes of India*, p.30.

The Munda tribals not only practise tribal endogamy and commensality, but also observe a *jâti* division within the tribe, buttressed by notions of social pollution, a mythological explanation and harsh punishments.[88] A Munda Catholic theologian testifies: "The tribals of Chhotanagpur are an endogamous tribe. They usually do not marry outside the tribal community, because to them the tribe is sacred. The way to salvation is the tribe."[89] Among the Santals, "it is tabooed to marry outside the tribe or inside one's clan"[90], just as Hindus marry inside their caste and outside their *gotra*. More precisely: "To protect their tribal solidarity, the Santals have very stringent marriage laws. (...) a Santal cannot marry a non-Santal or a member of his own clan. The former is considered as a threat to the tribe's integrity, while the latter is considered incestuous."[91] Among the Ho of Chhotanagpur, "the trespasses which occasion the exclusion from the tribe without chance of appeal, are essentially those concerning endogamy and exogamy".[92]

A missionary notes: "The observance of the taboo [of marrying outside the tribe] is therefore far more fundamental than the offering of sacrifices to the spirits. If one seeks in another religion an alternative means of effectively dealing with them and of venerating God, this does not affect one's tribal status in the least. On the other hand, renouncing the tribe is normally felt by Sarna people to be nearly as dreadful as abandoning God himself."[93] In other words, the tribals display the same combination of doctrinal tolerance and caste strictness that is deemed typical of Hinduism. Possibly this combination exists in mainstream Hinduism as a tradition that dates back to tribal antiquity.

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[87] C. von Fürer-Haimendorf: *Tribes of India*, p.218-219.

[88] Martin Topno: "Pati and Parha: Social Structure of the Munda", *Sevartham* 1991 (1978), p.9.

[89] Y. Philip Barjo: "The religious life of the Sarna tribes", *Indian Missiological Review*, June 1997, p.43.

[90] J. Troisi: *Tribal Religion*, p.227.

[91] J. Troisi: *Tribal Religion*, p.167.

[92] Serge Bouez: *Réciprocité et hiérarchie. L'alliance chez les Ho et les Santals de l'Inde*, p.76. Bouez quotes the speech of a village elder giving the rationality behind endogamy: the *ancestors* will be angry if a girl marries outside the tribe and thereby deprives them of her progeny, who would otherwise become part of the ancestors' constituency of worshippers, feeding them in the hereafter through sacrifice.

Christian missionaries have had to accommodate the attachment of tribals to their caste rules. In December 1891, Father Constant Lievens allowed one of his more zealous assistants, Father Walrave, to test the sincerity of 150 Munda converts and conversion candidates by asking them to inter-dine with other Christians who did not belong to the group with which they were allowed by tradition to share a meal. Only 20 people agreed to do so; the others walked out, and 7,000 converts in the area defected. This test is known among Chhotanagpur Jesuits as "the Mistake". And so, in 1892, Father Haghenbeek wrote that the taboo on commensality was not strictly a "pagan" practice, but merely an expression of "national sentiment and pride", not at all harmful even to Christians:

"On the contrary, while proclaiming the equality of all men before God, we now tell them: preserve your race pure, keep your customs, refrain from eating with Lohars (blacksmiths), Turis (bamboo workers) and other people of lower rank. To become good Christians, it (inter-dining) is not required."[94]

Summing up, we find that the notion that the tribals have no caste distinctions is mistaken.[95] The Hindu caste society is not antagonistic to tribal society, on the contrary, it is nothing but tribal society at a more advanced and integrated stage, where tribes are no longer self-contained societies but building-blocks of a much larger and more complex society.

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[93] A. Van Exem: "The Mistake, reviewed after a century", *Sevartham* 1991, p.88.

[94] A. Van Exem: "The Mistake", p.87.

[95] In keeping with the anti-caste trend in society at large, some modern-educated tribal youngsters now conclude love marriages with outsiders. In some cases, viz. when Muslims are involved, "these marriages have often triggered communal tension and violence in Chhotanagpur plateau", according to Manoj Prasad: "Stupid Cupid sees not caste, creed in Bihar", 23-1-1994, *Indian Express*, 23-1-1994.

This is how Brahmins integrated tribes into a larger Hindu society, according to the Marxist historian D.D. Kosambi: "The tribe as a whole turned into a new peasant *jâti* caste-group, generally ranked as Shudras, with as many as possible of the previous institutions (including endogamy) brought over. (...) The Brahmin often preserved tribal or local peasant *jâti* customs and primitive lore in some special if modified form (...) This procedure enabled Indian society to be formed out of many diverse and even discordant elements, with the minimum use of violence."[96]

What Kosambi says is that the Brahmins did not impose the caste system, they found it ready-made in its defining features of endogamy and commensality, and they blessed it. The Indian caste system is the continuation in agricultural and urban society of an ancient tribal institution. Tribal endogamy was preserved when the tribal hunter-gatherer lifestyle was surpassed because, as veteran India-watcher Girilal Jain told me: "In India, nothing ever dies."[97]

9.12. Temples and "animist shrines"

There exists a profound continuity between literate Brahmanism and the illiterate "animism" of the tribal communities which gradually joined Brahmanic society in the past. Hinduism has been described, in the introduction to a pre-Independence Census Report (1901), as "animism more or less transformed by philosophy, or to condense the epigram, as magic tempered by metaphysics".[98] This echoes what leading archaeologist S.R. Rao said about the Harappan religion, "ranging from very elevated philosophical and ethical concepts down to a crude animism".[99]

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[96] D.D. Kosambi: *Culture and Civilization of Ancient India*, p.172.

[97] Interview at Girilal Jain's house in South Delhi, March 1990.

[98] Quoted with approval by Premchand Roychand: *Ethnic Elements in Ancient Hinduism*, p.1.

When convenient, even the secularists readily admit the continuity between Hinduism and more primitive phases of Indian culture. Thus, one editorial asserts about the Hindu festivals of Holi and Diwali: "These festivals, in fact, are not really defined as Hindu. They are ancient events of the solar calendar that predate Hinduism. The practice of cremation, too, has come down from time immemorial and is not peculiarly Hindu."[100] A more sympathetic way to make this same point would be to admit that Holi, Diwali and the practice of cremation are very Hindu (of course they are), and that consequently, Hinduism in India stretches back to "times immemorial" and includes pre-Vedic or "tribal" strands.

During the Ayodhya crisis, the secularists alleged that Hindus had demolished "animist shrines" and replaced them with Hindu temples such as Jagannath Puri This has been countered with reference to just this type of continuity, admitted in other contexts by the secularists themselves. Apart from the fact that "animists" usually didn't build shrines but preferred worship in the open air (just like the Vedic Aryans), mainly in sacred groves, research on the spot is quoted as revealing a much more positive kind of interaction between "animism" and Sanskritic Hinduism than violent replacement of one by the other.

Girilal Jain quotes a research volume about Puri: "The archaic iconography of the cult images on the one hand and their highest Hindu iconology on the other as well as the existence of former tribals (*daitas*) and Vedic Brahmins amongst its priests are by no means an antithesis, but a splendid regional synthesis of the local and the all-Indian tradition."[101] And he comments: "The uninterrupted tribal-

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[99] Quoted in A. Van Lysebeth: *Tantra*, p.19.

[100] "Killing with kindness: The VHP's conversion programme betrays bad faith", *Indian Express*, 29-6-1998.

[101] A. Eschmann, H. Kulke and G.C. Tripathi, eds.: *The Cult of Jagannath*, p.xv, quoted in G. Jain: *The Hindu Phenomenon*, p.23.

Hindu continuum finds its lasting manifestation in the Jagannath cult of Puri."[102]

After citing some similar cases, Jain proposes to "clinch the issue" with a very telling example: "The Lingaraja temple in Bhubaneswar, built in the eleventh century, has two classes of priests: Brahmins and a class called Badus who are ranked as Sudras and are said to be of tribal origin. Not only are Badus priests of this important temple; they also remain in the most intimate contact with the deity whose personal attendants they are. Only they are allowed to bathe the Lingaraja and adorn him and at festival time (...) only Badus may carry this movable image (...) the deity was originally under a mango tree (...) The Badus are described by the legend as tribals (*sabaras*) who originally inhabited the place and worshipped the *linga* under the tree."[103]

Linga worship is, of course, a hoary tradition carried from very ancient cultures into the centre of Hinduism. It is slightly absurd to accuse the linga-worshipping Hindus of demolishing the shrines of linga-worshipping tribals to replace them with temples for linga worship.

9.13. Hindu-tribal unity

Given the Hindu-tribal continuity, Guru Golwalkar proposed that for the integration of tribals and untouchables, one and the same formula applies: "They can be given *yajñopavîta* (...) They should be given equal rights and footings in the matter of religious rights, in temple worship, in the study of Vedas, and in general, in all our social and religious affairs. This is the only right solution for all the problems of casteism found nowadays in our Hindu society."[104]

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[102] G. Jain: *The Hindu Phenomenon*, p.23.

[103] G. Jain: *The Hindu Phenomenon*, p.24, with reference to Eschmann, Kulke and Tripathi, eds.: *Cult of Jagannath*, p.97.

[104] M.S. Golwalkar: *Bunch of Thoughts*, p.479. *Yajñopavîta*: the sacred thread given during Vedic initiation.

The RSS affiliate Vanavasi Kalyan Ashram is implementing this programme, adapting its strategy to the local situations.[105] In some cases, it will work for a full "sanskritization" as envisioned by Golwalkar. The schools which RSS-affiliated organizations have founded in tribal areas are thought of as new Vedic *gurukulas*, much closer to the original Vedic life-style than any urban Hindu school could offer, combining Sanskrit-centred education with the forest environment in which rishi Valmiki flourished. This is sociologist Gérard Heuzé's assessment:

"Those cost-free tribal schools, about a hundred in 1990, cater to an undemanding population, and often the poorest section of it. (...) These children are made to live like the 'Vedic ancestors', to which the vanavasis are supposed to have remained closer. It is also in this framework of mission to the tribals that the most traditional ideals of Hindu nationalism (power of the sage, study of Sanskrit) are implemented most seriously. These RSS schools have remained lacking in influence and prestige vis-à-vis the Christian mission colleges with their infinitely larger financial support base."[106]

In others situations, the VKA will support a grass-roots tribal reaction against the Christian missions, for the tribals have developed their own religious reform movements since more than a century, such as the Bhili Bhagats, Tana Bhagats, Sapta Hors and Haribaba. Though often adopting certain Christian elements, particularly a prophet-centred millennarism, the contents of their reforms can best be understood by comparison with the Arya Samaj, e.g. Jatra, the Oraon founder of the so-called Tana Bhagat movement (ca. 1920), told his followers to abstain from meat and alcohol, and enlisted his movement in the national freedom struggle.[107] Birsa Munda, whose Munda rebellion started with attacks on mission posts in 1899, claimed to have visions after the mode of the Biblical prophets, but told his flock to give up animal sacrifice, witchcraft and intoxication and to wear the sacred thread, all amounting to a kind of self-sanskritization.[108] While such charismatic leaders come and go, the tradition of tribal nativism continues, and the VKA seeks to channel it towards integration into a larger Hindu activism.

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[105] *Organiser* regularly reports on Vanavasi Kalyan Ashram activities, e.g. Prakash Kamath: "Serving vanvasis is our national duty", *Organiser*, 14-12-1997, or Pramod Kumar: "VKA vows to curb anti-national activities in N-E States", *Organiser*, 11-1-1998.

[106] G. Heuzé: *Où va l'Inde moderne?*, p.141.

For an example of a grass-roots movement towards integration in Hinduism inspired by the VKA: "A small village of Meghalaya, Smit, about 15 km away from the State capital Shillong, witnessed a unique gathering on April 20 when about 20,000 Khasi tribals of the State took a pledge to protect and preserve their traditional Sanatana Dharma. (...) The function was organised by the 'Seng Khasi Smit Circle', a branch of 'Seng Khasi Maukhar Organisation' which has branches in almost every village of Khasi and Jayantia hills. (...) Speaking on the occasion Shri G.L. Niyang of Jayantia hills said that he was offered many a time to adopt Christianity but he refused because of inspirations from his Hindu brethren who apprised him of the greatness of his religion."[109]

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[107] Vide A. Tirkey: "Evangelization among the Uraons", *Indian Missiological Review*, June 1997, esp. p.30-32. *Tana* means "pull out", a cry uttered during exorcism.

[108] Gérard Heuzé (*Où va l'Inde moderne?*, p.133) aptly notes that the tribal rebellions of the 19th century, such as the 1830 Kol movement, the 1855 *Santal Hool* and the 1899 Birsa rebellion, were incorporated by the Freedom Movement in its vision of a native tradition of struggle against foreign invaders (embodying "the authentic spirit of the nation"), though in fact, exploitation by native (Hindu and Muslim) landlords and money-lenders had also played a role in provoking the tribals into rebellion.

[109] "Khasi Tribals pledge to protect Sanatana Dharma", *Organiser* 25-5-1997. About the relation with the missions, Niyang "pointed out that the new generation, especially the school children, are confounded whether to be a Christian or remain Hindu as the teachers in their schools want to convert them into Christianity and their family members decide against it".

The two main distinctions breaking the cultural continuum between tribals and Hindus are these: the former have no taboo on cow-slaughter, and they have a sexual morality deemed loose by the Hindu middle class. As Gérard Heuzé remarks, "the tribals are known as people who drink alcohol and eat meat, sometimes even beef. They have, in this perspective, lowly and 'impure' mores which call for upliftment."[110] G.S. Ghurye has given an account of the rather vivid and varied sex life of some tribals he knew personally, not too different from what you see in the concrete jungles of American cities but quite repellent to middle-class Hindus.[111]

These are the things which have made the tribal despised in the eyes of upper-caste Hindus for centuries, but which they may well have in common with the Vedic Aryans. It seems that the tribals, in their relative isolation, have missed the development which changed the robust Vedic Aryans into the prudish, purity-obsessed Hindus of recent centuries.

As for sexual morality, Hindu society became a lot more prudish in several waves, the last and most pervasive being the contact with the Christian West in its Victorian phase.[112] By trying to whitewash the Vedic Aryans from the vices which modern scholarship has imputed to them (including cow-slaughter) and strait-jacket them into the fussy norms of modern Hinduism, Hindutva history-rewriters make the additional mistake of cutting some of their common roots with the tribals.

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[110] Gérard Heuzé: *Où va l'Inde moderne?*, p.140-141.

[111] G.S Ghurye: *The Scheduled Tribes*, p.60 ff.

[112] Several bawdy Vedic hymns (e.g. the duet of sage Agastya and his wife Lopamudra, who implores him to have intercourse with her more often, Rigveda 1:179; similarly RV 1:126:6-7, a love song fragment by Svanaya and his wife Romasha; and RV 10:61:5-8; in Ralph Griffith's translation, *Hymns of the Rigveda*, p.652-653, these passages are put in appendix and in Latin rather than English translation because of their explicit language) and Vatsyayana's Kama Sutra are evidence enough that the quasi-Victorian morality codes of modern middle-class Hindus diverge widely from Vedic and even post-Vedic standards.

9.14. BJP policies and the tribals

In a way, the main problem for tribal-Hindu unity is the Hindus themselves. Whatever arguments for tribal-Hindu kinship may have been considered above, most urban BJP-voting Hindu businessmen generally don't *feel* one with the tribals, whom they only know from TV documentaries; they don't feel concerned. Therefore, Shrikant Talageri calls on his fellow Hindus to change their outlook:

"On the Indian front, [the Hindutva movement] should spearhead the revival, rejuvenation and resurgence of Hinduism, which includes not only religious, spiritual and cultural practices springing from Vedic or Sanskritic sources, but from *all* other Indian sources independently of these: the practices of the Andaman islanders and the (pre-Christian) Nagas are as Hindu in the territorial sense, and *Sanâtana* in the spiritual sense, as classical Sanskritic Hinduism. (...) A true *Hindutvavâdî* should feel a pang of pain, and a desire to take positive action, not only when he hears that the percentage of Hindus in the Indian population is falling (...), or that Hindus are being discriminated against in almost every respect, but *also* when he hears that the Andamanese races and languages are becoming extinct; that vast tracts of forests, millions of years old, are being wiped out forever (...); that innumerable forms of arts and handicrafts, architectural styles, plant and animal species, musical forms and musical instruments etc. are becoming extinct."[113]

As for practical politics, the BJP emphatically supports a number of tribal demands, e.g. the creation of smaller states including statehood for the tribal areas of Bihar and Madhya Pradesh: "We promise to carve out Uttaranchal, Vananchal, Vidarbha and Chattisgarh and give them full statehood. We will further consider setting up a Commission to examine the formation of smaller States."[114] Shortly after coming to power, the BJP did create the states of Uttaranchal, Vananchal (but under the name Jharkhand favoured by the tribal movement for statehood) and Chattisgarh. The separation of Vidarbha from Maharashtra was blocked by the BJP's alliance partner, the Shiv Sena, but may get its chance in the future.

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[113] S. Talageri in S.R. Goel (ed.): *Time for Stock-Taking*, p.227-228.

However, one important tribal grievance presents more difficulties for the BJP: conservation of the tribal habitat in places where dams may be built. The Sangh Parivar counts many Gandhian proponents of environment-friendly "soft" development among its office-bearers.[115] Thus, the Tehri Dam is rejected because it is deemed seismically unsafe and because it encroaches on the natural purity of the sacred Ganga river. But there is also, mostly in the BJP, a strong no-nonsense wing of businessmen, more or less the old (pro-Western, anti-socialist) Swatantra Party constituency, which has no patience with such sentimentalism, and refuses to "turn India into a conservation site".[116] Thus, the VHP president for the Mumbai region, Ashok Chowgule, owned (until 1998, when he sold it) a company which furnished cement to the Narmada Dam.

In this case, the BJP's consolation is that the other parties have no better deal to offer: under any Government, rising population pressure is an objective factor limiting the possibilities to conserve tribal habitats. Leftists like Arundhati Roy may campaign all they want against the encroachment on tribal land by developers, the various Leftist parties have a very similar record in this regard whenever they have been in power. The objective necessity of economic development is only one of the ways in which even historically isolated tribes are moving closer to the mainstream, losing what distinctively "tribal" characteristics the British census officers had ascribed to them. To the extent that there exists a tribal identity, new social realities militate against its preservation and cause its irrevocable dissolution into the broader Hindu society.

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[114] BJP: *Election Manifesto 1996*, p.10. Likewise Balraj Madhok's plea for smaller states: "Re-draw India's Political Map!", *India Worldwide*, Dec. 1992.

[115] Nana Deshmukh's work concerning indigenous forms of "development" including such innovations as the "rural university" (see *Manthan*, April 1997) is a case in point. Deshmukh has said: "My ideal is not Raja Ram but Vanvasi Ram" ("Nanaji Deshmukh felicitated for national service", *Organiser*, 9-2-1997). Vide also Ram Swarup: *Gandhian Economics.* India's leading environmentalist Maneka Gandhi has been the Environment Minister in succesive BJP-dominated governments.

[116] Swapan Dasgupta: "Green Terrorism", *Sunday*, 5-6-1992.

9.15. Conclusion

Of all the traditions discussed in this book, tribal "animism" is the only one which cannot be described as an "offshoot" of Hinduism. Some tribal traditions may be transformed borrowings from the Sanskritic tradition, but in most cases they have developed in parallel with and separate from the Vedic tradition. In that sense they date back to antiquity and perhaps even to pre-Vedic times, though at that time-depth they may still have common roots with the Sanskritic mainstream.

If we go by the historical definition, the question whether tribals are Hindus is very simple to answer: they are Indians but not prophetic-monotheists, so they are Indian Pagans or Hindus. Moreover, typologically the tribal religions are similar to the Vedic religion. They have many elements in common, partly by distant common roots, partly by the integration of tribal elements in the expanding literate Sanskritic civilization, and partly by the adoption of elements from the Vedic-Puranic Great Tradition in the tribal Little Traditions

A first little problem appears when we consider Savarkar's definition: do tribals, who have no ancestral or religious attachment to any place outside India, really consider "India" as their Fatherland and Holyland? Savarkar seems not to have thought the matter through, but obviously a separatist from Nagaland could say that not India but only Nagaland is his Fatherland and Holyland. The ancestors of the Nagas and of some other tribals never performed the pilgrimage cycle around India, never employed priests from the all-India Brahmin caste, never learned the all-India lingua franca, Sanskrit, and never even listened to the all-India lore of the Hindu epics. Their Fatherland and Holyland was effectively confined to their own part of the tribal belt.

Therefore, whereas a case without ifs and buts could be made that "Sikhs are Hindus" or "Ramakrishnaites are Hindus", such a straightforward and simple claim cannot be made regarding the tribals, at least not if we follow Savarkar's definition, which breaks down at this point.

If we consider essentialist definitions, we find that tribal cultures have a lot in common with Hinduism thus defined, including a strong sense of caste (endogamy, commensality, in some cases even untouchability) and various doctrines of reincarnation, as well as similarities in forms of polytheistic worship. In many cases, cow slaughter is one element which sets them apart, but only from classical Hinduim, not from older Vedic and pre-Vedic forms.

From a Christian or Islamic viewpoint, any such differences between tribal "animism" and Hinduism are purely academic, since by all accounts both religions belong to the polytheistic and Pagan category. This does not nullify the practical distance between many Hindus and many tribals, a cultural gap which Hindu activists are working hard to bridge. In this effort, they are greatly helped by the natural socio-economic evolution which is inexorably drawing the tribals into society's mainstream and hence into its predominant religion, Hinduism.

10. Are Buddhists Hindus?

10.1. A polemic and a high-brow debate

Now that Christians have started talking about "Jesus the Jew", it is to be expected that Hindus and Buddhists should explore the notion "Buddha the Hindu", or at least to highlight the Hindu foundations on which the Buddha built. It is now fairly widely accepted that Jesus was a millennarist cult leader inside the Jewish fold who did not conceive of his own message and mission as a new religion; the question may be asked whether the Buddha was not likewise an innovator within the Hindu tradition. But so far, that question has only been raised by the Hindu Revivalists and a lone Western scholar, certainly not by Buddhists, and to secularists the question is mere proof of evil Hindu imperialist ("boa constrictor") designs.

According to BJP leader and Home Minister L.K. Advani, the Buddha "did not announce any new religion. He was only restating with a new emphasis the ancient ideals of the Indo-Aryan civilisation".[1] Advani reportedly provoked the dismay of a handful of foreign Buddhist scholars by saying that the Buddha "derived his teachings from the Bhagwad Gita and was an avatar of Vishnu".[2] And the dismay of the polemicizing secularists who reported the event and claimed that "Buddhism arose as a distinct faith, in revolt against hierarchical Hinduism" while Advani's position amounted to "communal poison".[3]

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[1] Quoted by Praful Bidwai: "Hindutva's fallacies and fantasies", *Frontline*, 21-11-1998.

[2] Report in *The Telegraph*, 7-11-1998, quoted in Praful Bidwai: "Hindutva's fallacies and fantasies", *Frontline*, 21-11-1998.

[3] Praful Bidwai: "Hindutva's fallacies and fantasies", *Frontline*, 21-11-1998.

Yet, when Hindu Revivalists claim Buddhism as a continuous evolute of Hinduism, they join an established viewpoint articulated by Western scholars with no axe to grind. Christian Lindtner quotes with approval Dharmakirti's list of four doctrines of contemporaneous Brahmanism which Buddhism rejected: "The authority of the Veda, the doctrine of a Creator of the world, the conviction that rituals can cause moral purity, and the haughtiness based on claims of birth". Then Lindtner adds: "Apart from that, ancient Indian Buddhism should be seen as reformed Brahmanism."[4] He shows that Vedic "cosmogonic speculations and Vedic exegesis were vital and formative for Gautama's way of thinking", that after the Vedic injunction, he was "concerned with *tad ekam* beyond *sat* and *asat*".[5] After presenting many more Vedic concepts adopted by Buddhism, Lindtner summarizes that "early (canonical) Buddhism to a very considerable extent can and should be seen as reformed Brahmanism".[6]

Though Western scholarship is usually invoked as the ultimate trump card with which to silence opponents, the Buddha-separatist authors prefer to ignore or dismiss it in this case. Thus, Buddhist scholar David J. Kalupahana, who rejects the inclusion of Buddhism in Hinduism, is irritated with

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[4] Christian Lindtner: "From Brahmanism to Buddhism", *Asian Philosophy*, 1999, p.22. It could be argued that belief in an extra-cosmic Creator is but a clumsy interpretation of certain instances of Vedic poetry, and not strictly Vedic (even the neo-Vedic monotheist Swami Dayananda was arguably a pantheist, who located his one God within the universe). Hindu reformists would probably say the same of caste pride, which by Dharmakirti's day seems to have been established well enough as a cornerstone of Hindu society.

[5] Christian Lindtner: "From Brahmanism to Buddhism", *Asian Philosophy*, 1999, p.22. *Tad ekam*: "That One". *Sat/asat*: being/non-being, e.g. many Buddhist texts assert that of the Self, one cannot really say that "it is" nor that "it is not", an idea which Lindtner (p.26) traces straight to Yajnavalkya's dictum *neti neti*.

[6] Christian Lindtner: "From Brahmanism to Buddhism", *Asian Philosophy*, 1999, p.5.

Western scholarship: "Hindu scholars writing on Buddhism made such statements as this: 'Early Buddhism is not an absolutely original doctrine. It is no freak in the evolution of Indian thought.' But even a more sober scholar from the West felt that 'Buddhism started from special Indian beliefs, which it took for granted. The chief of these were the belief in transmigration and the doctrine of retribution of action (...) They were already taken for granted as a commonly accepted view of life by most Indian religions.'"[7]

Kalupahana calls these views "unhistorical", "uncritical" and "superficial"; and by implication, he calls them "not sober", and ridicules them for denying that Buddhism was "a freak in the evolution of Indian thought".[8] This is but one instance of the humourless reaction of contemporary Buddhists against the suspicion that Buddhism was not sent down in a flash from heaven, but developed organically from its Hindu roots.

The first one to hold these views which irritate certain modern Buddhists may well have been the Buddha himself, who claimed to teach "the ancient way along which the previous Buddhas walked".[9] His pride lay not in being original, but in being a representative of a timeless truth: "The Buddhas who have been and who shall be, of these am I and what they did, I do."[10]

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[7] David Kalupahana: *Buddhist Philosophy*, p.44-45. Reference is to S. Radhakrishnan: *Indian Philosophy* (Allen & Unwin, London 1962), vol.1, p.360, and to E.J. Thomas: "Buddhism in Modern Times", *University of Ceylon Review* (Colombo), 9 (1951), p.216.

[8] David Kalupahana: *Buddhist Philosophy*, p.44-45. Kalupahana locates the Buddha's uniqueness in the fact that he "personally verified" the law of *karma* through his own "clear paranormal clairvoyant vision". The occultish terminology does injustice to the Buddha and hurts the Buddhist claims of rationality, but more importantly, Kalupahana's assertion implies the unprovable claim that no one had achieved that state of consciousness before Gautama did.

[9] *Milinda-Panha* 10:44, see e.g. Bhikkhu Pesala: *The Debate of King Milinda*, p.62.

[10] To use the formulation of Edwin Arnold: *Light of Asia*.

Yet, the undeniable rootedness of the Buddha's teachings in vaguely "Hindu" ideas and traditions does not exclude the possibility that at least on some doctrinal points, Buddhism does constitute a break-away, a definite rejection of some prevalent views and practices. Four important points are sure to be mentioned in modern company: Buddhism's purported rejection of caste inequality, the value of non-violence, the doctrine of No Self, and a pessimistic and avowedly escapist view of the world. They will all be considered in this and the next chapter.

10.2. Buddhism as India's state religion

The relation between Hinduism and Buddhism, or between Brahmanism and Shramanism, i.e. the non-Vedic sects practising world-renunciation (celibate monkhood), has been one of intellectual controversy since antiquity.[11] Today, Shramanism is represented by the traditions of Jainism and Buddhism, but in the time of their eponymous founders, Vardhamana Mahavira Jina and Siddhartha Gautama the Buddha, there were dozens of separate Shramana sects with their distinctive doctrines and rules. Vedic Hinduism has also incorporated Shramanism in the form of the Dashanami order of celibate monks founded by Shankaracharya (ca. 800 AD) and other Sadhu orders founded by a number of Sants. In the rest of this chapter, we will only consider the attitude of the Hindu movement vis-à-vis Buddhism.

The Hindu position regarding Buddhism is also of some practical importance due to the following circumstances. Firstly, the relations with Buddhist countries are considered to be of great political importance as a counterweight to the Western, Islamic and Communist blocs. Secondly, Buddhism has made a remarkable but heavily politicized come-back in India, first with the conversion of Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar and millions of his Scheduled Caste followers (1956), and soon after with the settlement of a high-profile Tibetan refugee community and a Tibetan Government-in-Exile (1959).

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[11] The high-brow debates between the two are presented in N.N. Bhattacharyya: *Buddhism in the History of Indian Ideas*; Chitrarekha V. Kher: *Buddhism as Presented by the Brahmanical Systems*; and V. Subramaniam, ed.: *Buddhist-Hindu Interactions.*

The Hindutva position on Buddhism is generally not one of hostility, though in the past, Swami Dayananda and Veer Savarkar did write a few trenchant paragraphs criticizing Buddhism. Today, the tendency is simply to include Buddhism in Hinduism, with very little effort to give a scholarly articulation to this claim apart from emphasizing the Bharatiya origin of Buddhism.

Buddhism was turned into "India's undeclared state religion" by Jawaharlal Nehru.[12] Thus, he borrowed the Buddhist term Pancha Shila (five moral rules) to describe the "five principles of peaceful co-existence" laid down in the Sino-Indian Treaty of 1954 *a la* the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk signed between Germany and Bolshevik Russia in 1917. When invoking the national tradition of religious pluralism, Nehru credited Buddhism: "Even since the distant past, it has been India's proud privilege to live in harmony with each other. That has been the basis of India's culture. Long ago, the Buddha taught us this lesson. From the days of Ashoka, 2300 years ago, this aspect of our thought has been repeatedly declared and practised."[13] The omission of Hindu tradition here is obviously unfair: the Buddha, rather than bringing religious pluralism, was himself a beneficiary of a well-established pluralism, which allowed him to preach his doctrine for fifty years and die in old age of natural causes.

The Lion Pillar of the Maurya emperor Ashoka was made into India's official state emblem and is depicted on Indian currency notes and coins. The 24-spoked Dharma Chakra in India's national flag was understood to be a symbol introduced by Ashoka (it also figures on his pillars, between the two lions), known for his patronage of Buddhism and claimed to be a convert to Buddhism.[14] Nehru, on top of presenting the Chakra as a truly representative and truly Indian symbol (as would befit the national flag), explicitly associated it with Ashoka and with the ideology-based policies he stood for:

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[12] The term is heard regularly; one who has gone in print with it is BHU Prof. Kedar Nath Mishra, interviewed by John Feys: "Christians? Not an Issue", *Studia Missionalia* 1993, p.290.

[13] J. Nehru: broadcast to the nation, 26-3-1964, reproduced in *Mainstream*, 24-5-1986.

"That Wheel is a symbol of India's culture. It is a symbol of many things that India had stood for through the ages. (...) we have associated with this flag not only this emblem, but in a sense, the name of Ashoka, one of the most magnificent names not only in India's history, but in the history of the whole world."[15]

Unknown to Nehru, the Chakra was a pre-Ashokan and pre-Buddhist symbol of "uniting the many", viz. the different autonomous parts of India under one suzerain or "wheel-turner" (*chakravarti*; the term implied in the Buddhist term *dharmachakrapravartana*, "setting in motion the wheel of the Dharma"). So, in spite of Nehru, the centre-space of India's flag ended up being taken by a truly national rather than a sectarian symbol. Nehru's intended imposition of a specific historical model and the concomitant ideological message on a national symbol does amount, at least in principle, to the declaration of a state ideology. Like Ashoka, who used his throne to preach Dharma, Nehru was guilty of "*varṇa-sankara*", here not in the sense of intermarriage between varnas but in the sense of mixing up the distinct social functions: as rulers, they had no business setting themselves up as preachers, since these are distinct roles best exercised by separate groups of people.

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[14] Whether Ashoka really was a Buddhist is still a matter of dispute, quite comparable to the question whether the pro-Christian Roman Emperor Constantine really converted to Christianity. In both cases, the claim is known only through sources belonging to the religion which benefited. His references to "Dharma" may have a broader meaning than just Buddhism, and his reverence for things Buddhist may simply have been part of the larger Hindu attitude, like that of the Shaiva king Harsha who looked well after the Buddhist site Bodh Gaya.

[15] Quoted in B.K. Baranjia: "Emperor Ashoka rides again", *Sunday Observer*, 18 March 1990. Nehru had borrowed the glorification of Ashoka as the greatest ruler in history from H.G. Wells' book *An Outline of History*, written just after World War 1, when pacifist sentiment was at its strongest and Ashoka's reputed renunciation of violence after the Kalinga war counted as an example for all rulers to emulate. It goes without saying that Nehru was 100% ignorant of primary sources on Buddhism and Ashoka.

Even in the choice of the official calendar, Nehru managed to impose his Buddhist leanings. Against the general preference for the widely-used Vikram Samvat (counting from Vikramaditya, 57 BC) or the traditional Kali Yuga (counting from Krishna's death, 3102 BC), he opted for the Shaka Samvat, supposed to have been instituted by another Buddhist emperor, Kanishka: "Our modern young republic has immortalised him by adopting Saka Era which was started by him in 78 AD when he ascended the throne."[16] The exact basis of this calendar is actually disputed, and in this case Nehru's concern was perhaps less pro-Buddhist than simply anti-Hindu. Shaka Samvat was for him a way to distance himself from the Hindu preference, comparable to his advocacy of Jana Gana Mana over Vande Mataram as national anthem, of English over Hindi as the link language, of "Hindustani" (i.e. Urdu) over proper Hindi, and of Western-Arabic over Sanskritic numerals.

While political speeches and Government-approved schoolbooks in India are full of criticism of "the evils of Hindu society", there is not one which will offer even the faintest criticism of the Buddha and Buddhism. In orientalist Western and urban Indian circles, both Hindu and secularist, it is taken for granted that all kinds of things are wrong with Hinduism, but criticizing Buddhism is just not done. It is very hard to find a contemporary book on Buddhism which fails to disparage Hinduism at some point.[17]

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[16] D.C. Ahir: *India's Debt to Buddhism*, p.40. Note that no modern Buddhist ever writes about "Buddhism's debt to India",—their whole line of Buddhism's absolute originality militates against admitting it. Kanishka was a Kushana, one of the semi-nomadic Central-Asian peoples collectively known *pars pro toto* as Scythians or Shakas, hence "Shaka Era". If Nehru had known anything about Buddhism, particularly its other-worldliness, he would have dropped it like Hinduism which stank in nostrils because it had been presented as superstition and caste oppression by Islamic and Christian missionaries and some leading Western thinkers of his days.

Except in Christian missionary literature and a single Hindutva pamphlet, any incisive criticism of Buddhism by contemporary authors is truly hard to find. So, at the level of academic and public discourse, Hinduism finds itself in an uphill battle for the public's favour with Buddhism, unless it incorporates Buddhism.

10.3. Buddhism as an ally against Islam

Before dealing with the Hindu attitude vis-à-vis Buddhism proper, we should mention a commonality of interest between Hindus and Buddhists vis-à-vis a third party, viz. Islam. Three regions are in focus:

1. Bangladesh, where Muslim settlers backed by the Islamic Government took over the lands of Buddhist and other non-Muslim tribes in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, effectively expelling the natives. Some of these fled to India, while others started an armed resistance movement called Shanti Bahini ("peace squad"), which agreed to dissolve itself under the terms of a peace treaty concluded with the Bangladesh Government in 1997.

2. India's Northeast, where Buddhist and other non-Muslim tribes are confronted with Muslim illegal immigrants from Bangladesh; the picture is complicated by resentment among non-Muslim natives against the Buddhist refugees from Bangladesh, especially in Arunachal Pradesh.

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[17] Thus, for the mildest of examples, Thomas Cleary (*Buddhist Yoga*, p.vii) introduces "the subtle metaphysics and refined methods of spiritual development characteristic of Buddhist Yoga" by contrasting them with "the elaborate psycho-physical exercise routines of Hindu Yoga". That could have been worse, but still, Dr. Cleary, how about acknowledging "the subtle metaphysics and refined methods of spiritual development" like Samkhya and Patanjala Yoga extant in Hindu Yoga too?

3. Ladakh, where a shrinking Buddhist majority feels threatened by a growing and assertive Muslim minority, all the more so because nearby Kargil has witnessed exactly the development which Ladakhis fear: through demographics and conversions (esp. of Buddhist brides married into Muslim families); a small immigrant group of Muslims in the 19th century has by now become the majority, and the Buddhist character of the region is but a memory.[18]

All three situations are monitored regularly (though certainly not closely, merely giving publicity to reports and resolutions which the affected communities themselves have prepared) by the Hindutva press. The Buddhist minority in Kargil (in Jammu & Kashmir) shares the long-standing RSS demand that an anti-conversion law be enacted. The BJP has succeeded in recruiting a number of Ladakh Buddhists into its ranks.[19] After summing up some discriminations imposed by the Muslim state and district authorities on the Buddhists of Kargil, representatives of the Ladakh Buddhist Association complain:

"As if this is not enough, there is a deliberate and organised design to convert Kargil's Buddhists to Islam. In the last four years, about 50 girls and married women with children were allured and converted from village Wakha alone. If this continues unchecked, we fear that Buddhists will be wiped out from Kargil in the next two decades or so. Anyone objecting to such allurement and conversions is harassed."[20]

The most challenging face of Buddhism in India is that of the neo-Buddhist movement initiated by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar.

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[18] A brief history of Ladakh's relation with the state of Kashmir, including the 1947 request for a partition of Kashmir to avoid passing under Muslim dominance, is given in P. Stobdan: "Overlooking Ladakhi aspirations", *Indian Express*, 15-3-1995.

[19] "Zanskar youth to join BJP", *Organiser*, 12-2-1995.

[20] Tundup Tsering and Tsewang Nurboo, in: "Ladakh visited", *Pioneer*, 4/12/1995.

However, here too the commonality of Hindu and Buddhist interests in facing Islam is explicit, at least in Dr. Ambedkar's own writings though less so in those of his present-day followers. Whatever criticism of Hinduism Ambedkar may have formulated, his open rejection of both Christianity and Islam (who assiduously courted him in the hope that he would bring the Scheduled Castes into their fold) has endeared him to Hindu activists. Ambedkar took a cool and hard look at Islam as a sworn enemy of Hindu society, even while being bitterly critical of the latter.

Dr. Ambedkar was particularly outspoken about the social injustices in Islam, especially in his book *Pakistan or the Partition of India* (1940). According to his biographer Dhananjay Keer, "some penetrating and caustic paragraphs were deleted, it is said, at the instance of Ambedkar's close admirers" for the sake of his own safety; but what remains is still quite radical.[21] Dr. Ambedkar also rejected Islam because it had destroyed Buddhism in India and other countries. Many present-day Ambedkarites never tire of quoting his one-liner: "The history of India is nothing but a history of a mortal conflict between Buddhism and Brahmanism."[22] But Dr. Ambedkar has also written: "There can be no doubt that the fall of Buddhism was due to the invasions of the Muslims."[23]

Referring to the Persian word for "idol", *but*, derived from *Buddha*, Dr. Ambedkar observes: "Thus the origin of the word indicates that in the Muslim mind idol worship had come to be identified with the religion of Buddha. To the Muslims they were one and the same thing. The mission to break idols thus became the mission to destroy Buddhism. Islam destroyed Buddhism not only in India but wherever it went. Bactria, Parthia, Afghanistan, Gandhara and Chinese Turkestan (...) in all these countries Islam destroyed Buddhism."[24]

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[21] Dh. Keer: *Ambedkar*, p.334, with reference to B.R. Ambedkar: *Pakistan or the Partition of India*, reprinted as vol.8 of *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches.*

[22] B.R. Ambedkar: *Writings and Speeches*, vol.3, p.267 (in the Chapter: "The triumph of Brahminism: regicide or the birth of counter-revolution"). To this sweeping statement, he adds: "So neglected is this truth that no one will be found to give it his ready acceptance." In fact, this non-acceptance need not be a sign of neglect.

[23] B.R. Ambedkar: *Writings and Speeches*, vol.3, p.229 (in the Chapter "The decline and fall of Buddhism").

Moreover: "The Muslim invaders sacked the Buddhist universities of Nalanda, Vikramasila, Jagaddala, Odantapuri to name only a few. They razed to the ground Buddhist monasteries with which the country was studded. The monks fled away in thousands to Nepal, Tibet and other places outside India. A very large number were killed outright by the Muslim commanders."[25]

It is useful to quote Dr. Ambedkar as restating these facts, for the secularists work overtime to deny them. Thus, Marxist history-rewriter Praful Bidwai claims: "Despotic state power persecuted Buddhists for centuries as brahminical Hinduism held sway in large parts of India. Buddhism was all but banished from this land and found refuge in Sri Lanka, Tibet, Myanmar, Thailand and eastwards."[26] In fact, Buddhism went to these lands at a time when it was still flourishing in India, so that at the time of the Muslim invasions, the surviving monks fled to those countries because they knew a Buddhist establishment was already in existence there.

Today, Dalit leaders like Bahujan Samaj Party president Kanshi Ram woo the Muslim community.[27] Yet, the pro-

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[24] B.R. Ambedkar: *Writings and Speeches*, vol.3, p.229-230.

[25] B.R. Ambedkar: *Writings and Speeches*, vol.3, p.232.

[26] Praful Bidwai: "Hindutva's fallacies and fantasies", *Frontline*, 21-11-2001. While accusing L.K. Advani of history falsification, Bidwai himself does just that, and restates long-discredited myths such as the arrival of Christianity with Saint Thomas, all while denying solid facts such as the Christian missionary intention to convert (restated unambiguously by the Pope himself in Delhi 1999). In the West, secularism implies pinpricking religious fraud and arrogance, but in India, secularists are the most eloquent defenders of myth and theocracy.

[27] *Bahujan Samâj*: "Society of the masses/majority". *Bahujan* is used by casteist parties as a term for all non-"upper" castes, i.e. Scheduled Castes and Tribes plus Other Backward Castes.

Islamic orientation which some of them (most staunchly V.T. Rajshekar in his fortnightly *Dalit Voice*) want to give to the Ambedkarite movement, is not at all in consonance with Dr. Ambedkar's own view of Islam.[28] Many of Dr. Ambedkar's observations on Islam would now be branded as "Hindu communalist" by the very people who claim his heritage. In fact, the literature of the RSS Parivar offers no counterpart to Ambedkar's strong language about Islam: he was more openly anti-Islamic than Savarkar, Golwalkar or any Hindutva stalwart who is regularly accused of being just that. From the Hindu Revivalist point of view, Ambedkar, in writing his incisive criticism of Islam, did the homework which the Hindutva ideologues neglected.

10.4. Swami Dayananda on Buddhism

The one Hindu leader who could always be counted upon to polemicize against rival religions was Arya Samaj founder Swami Dayananda Saraswati. However, contrary to his refutations of Christianity and Islam, Dayananda's critique of Buddhism is limited to certain highbrow points of philosophy, and avoids attacks on the morality of the founder or on the humanity of the religion's historical career. We forego discussion of the scholastic points on the epistemology and metaphysics of Buddhism.[29] We will consider the argument against the far more fundamental Buddhist doctrine of *Dukkha* (suffering).

Against the cardinal principle of *Dukkha*, "(all is) suffering", the first of the Buddha's "Four Noble Truths", Dayananda asserts: "Had there been nothing in this world but pain and sorrow, no living soul would have had an inclination for anything in this world; but it is our daily experience that the souls do desire for the objects of this world, hence it cannot be true that in the whole universe there is nothing but pain and sorrow. If the Buddhists really believe in the above doctrine, why do they attend to the health of their bodies, and for this purpose take food and drink and follow the laws of health and in case of sickness take medicine etc.? (...) If they answer that they certainly do these things but at the same time believe that they lead to misery and pain, it can never be true because the soul takes to what is conducive to its happiness and shuns what entails misery and suffering. Practice of virtue, acquisition of knowledge and wisdom, association with the good and the like undoubtedly are conducive to man's happiness. No wise man can ever assert that these result in pain and sorrow."[30]

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[28] An Ambedkarite publication summarizing Ambedkar's case against Islam is Surendra Ajnat: *Ambedkar on Islam* (1986), published in an earlier version as "Why did Dr. Ambedkar not embrace Islam?", *Outcry* (organ of the Ambedkar Mission, Canada), April 1984. It is a Buddhist reply to musings in Dalit circles that Ambedkar's choice in favour of Buddhism was a mistake because Dalit mass conversion to Islam would have frightened the Hindus more.

[29] On Buddhist epistemology, see Dayananda: *Light of Truth*, p.512-520.

Our natural experience is indeed that both suffering and happiness exist. While certain unwise forms of pleasure are pregnant with experiences of pain, it is rather sweeping to include all occasions of happiness in this category.[31] It is by no means certain that happiness is unreal; at most one could say that all worldly happiness is very unimpressive when compared with the profound happiness of the yogic state of consciousness.

Moreover, asymmetrical models like the Buddhist inclusion of happiness in suffering are liable to being inverted, with the inverted model being just as reasonable: just as all happy moments may be considered spoiled by the concomitant fear of losing that which makes happy, all fleeting moments of suffering are redeemed by the ensuing moments of relief resulting in restored happiness. This way, one could just as well say that "all is bliss". But Dayananda upholds the more commonsensical position, which is that, of course, both happiness and suffering are real.

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[30] Dayananda: *Light of Truth*, p.516-517.

[31] This may be compared to the pre-Socratic idea of reducing all different substances to jut one of them, e.g. "everything is water", meaning that air or fire are somehow watery at bottom.

Though the actual meditation practices taught by Vedantic and Buddhist yogis are not very different, the intellectual constructions which the two traditions have built around the yogic experience are in some ways diametrical opposites. In Vedanta, the basic vision is positive: the experience of the Self is Reality-Consciousness-Bliss, it is what we have to get into.[32] An afterthought could be that compared with this yogic bliss, any external form of happiness is comparatively bleak; but it could also be the realization that the same blissful Self pervades everything. In Buddhism, the basic vision is negative: life is suffering brought about by the unquenchable thirst of desire; it is what we have to get away from. Fortunately, an alternative is found in the experience of Nirvana, so all is well that ends well; but the negative starting-point remains the distinctive signature of Buddhist philosophy.

In the Upanishads, the awakening to the Self is the crown of all possible happy experiences, a happiness worth seeking for its own sake. To the Vedic seers, the worldly experiences are a mixed bag of sorrow and happiness, in which capable people can ensure (through *nîti*, "policy", intelligent conduct)[33] that the balance of their lives is on the positive side; but this real measure of worldly happiness should only spur us onwards to a more perfect happiness of *enstasis* (to use Mircea Eliade's term)[34] in the Self. This experience is desirable not because it is an escape from worldly suffering, but because it is so terrifically *true*, a true perception of one's true Self.

Swami Dayananda could have made his critique of Buddhism more attractive if he had elaborated more on what

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[32] The affirmation that bliss is the fundamental experience of the cosmos is the central message of the *Taittirîya Upanishad*, esp. 2:7-8. Bliss is the most fundamental layer in the Upanishadic view of personality as five-layered (body tissue, vital energies, mind, higher intelligence, and "bliss"), the most intimate layer around the impersonal Self.

[33] *Nîti*, "policy", is the central value taught in the fable collection Panchatantra, conceived as a manual to teach statecraft to princes.

[34] M. Eliade: *Yoga*, p.37; *enstasis* is a translation of *samâdhî*.

Buddhism has in common with the positive Vedantic way. What is in common is after all the most important part, viz. the practice of inner concentration.

An unpleasant suggestion would be that yogic practice was outside Dayananda's intellectual focus because he himself didn't practise much.[35] This is in general a real problem: monks whose prestige is derived from the assumption that they practice yoga, but who don't really practise. As the late Agehananda Bharati, the Austrian Indologist and nominally also a Hindu monk, observed: "Yoga and other esoteric wisdoms are talked about, the monks and the other gurus of the Hindu Renaissance are listened to and quoted, but their votaries do not really meditate. They *talk* about meditation. This also holds for modern monks whose professed job it is to meditate." The same is true in Buddhism, e.g. in Sri Lanka, the practice of meditation fell into disuse centuries ago, to be replaced by ritualism, scholastic argument and political intrigue.[36] This goes far in explaining the petty anti-Hindu sectarianism (including successful incitement to the destruction of Hindu temples) common among the Lankan Buddhist clergy. It is not the accomplished yogis who indulge in sectarian identity politics.

However, to my knowledge, and judging from the apparent seriousness with which leading lights of the present-day Arya Samaj practise yoga, the suggestion would be unfair in the case of Dayananda.[37] The more fitting explanation would probably remind us first of all that even yogic accomplishment does not magically create worldly skills such as intellectual knowledge, not even knowledge pertaining to other spiritual philosophies beside one's own. As we shall see, even the Buddha himself can reasonably be suspected of incomplete and inaccurate knowledge of other (viz Upanishadic) philosophies, a matter entirely divorced from his undeniable yogic accomplishment. Dayananda's objective was at any rate not to give a full account of rival viewpoints, merely to indicate where they strayed from the Vedic vision as he understood it.

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[35] Agehananda Bharati: *The Light at the Center*, p.128.

[36] As decribed by the British convert Sangharakshita: "Religio-nationalism in Sri Lanka", *Alternative Traditions*, p.69 ff.

[37] When I met Arya Samaj president Vandematharam Ramachandra Rao, he was in his eighties but looked about fifty; he attributed his splendid condition to the daily practice of yoga.

10.5. Incorporating the Buddha

In recent decades, the Buddha has been enshrined as one of the great sages of Hinduism. This is largely due to the influence of Western tastes, which have promoted the Buddha (supposedly a rationalist and votary of social justice as against Hindu superstition and caste oppression) to the status of India's major claim to fame. This influence has operated mainly through two entries to Hindu society: a certain governmental effort springing from Jawaharlal Nehru's glorification of the Buddha and the pro-Buddhist Emperor Ashoka, and genuine intellectual developments in non-Arya Samaj Hindu Revivalism.

Even the Arya Samaj has been touched by this tendency, and its newer publications have little anti-Buddhist polemic left in them. Rather, the tendency now is to pick from Buddhism those points which are seemingly in common with the Arya Samaj's programme.

For example, in the Chapter "Our saints and sages" of an Arya Samaj catechism book, the very first sage discussed is the Buddha. Most of the text simply narrates the well-known episodes of the 29-year-old Siddharta Gautama discovering the phenomenon of suffering and of the accomplished Buddha dissuading king Bimbisara from conducting a large-scale sacrifice of animals. In the summary of the Buddha's five "most important teachings", the fourth one is: "All human beings are equal. There is no high or low caste."[38] Though it is doubtful that the Buddha cared about social inequality, this anti-caste plank is now routinely attributed to him, and the Arya Samaj follows suit by adopting it into its own long-standing campaign for social equality.

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[38] Pandit Nardev Vedalankar: *Basic Teachings of Hinduism*, p.43.

An even sharper contrast between criticism and subsequent glorification of Buddhism is found in the writings of Veer Savarkar, whom we shall get to know as an unforgiving critic of Buddhism. In a chapter titled "Reverence to Buddha", Savarkar tones down his attack: "We have while writing this section wounded our own feelings. So we hasten to add that the few harsh words we had to say in explaining the political necessity that led to the rejection of Buddhism in India should not be understood to mean that we have not a very high opinion of that Church as a whole! No, no! I am as humble an admirer and an adorer of that great and holy Sangha, the holiest the world has ever seen, as any of its initiated worshippers.(...) The consciousness that the first great and the most successful attempt to wean man from the brute inherent in him was conceived, launched and carried on from century to century by a galaxy of great teachers, Arhats and Bhikkus who were born in India, who were bred in India and who owned India as the land of their worship, fills us with feelings too deep for words."[39]

There is scope for debate about the Hindu or un-Hindu inspiration in the basic doctrines of Buddhism, partly equivalent to the doubts about the exact meaning of the term *Hindu*. The fact remains that the Hindu Renaissance starting among English-speaking Hindus in Calcutta resolutely chose to embrace the Buddha and emphasize his Hindu-ness.

The first reason for including Buddhism in Hinduism (and it is an observation which in itself cannot honestly be doubted) is that, after its establishment as a separate sect, Buddhism has continually moved closer to its Puranic or Tantric surroundings. Tibetan Buddhism, a fairly late offshoot of Indian Mahayana Buddhism, is very close to Hinduism in most respects, starting with its elaborate ritualism. But in

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[39] V.D. Savarkar: *Hindutva*, p.35-37.

Japanese Buddhism too, we find many practices that are not traditionally Japanese nor Buddhist in the strictest sense, but that have been carried along by Buddhism as a part of its Hindu heritage, e.g. the fire ceremony of the Shingon sect which, like the Vedic sacrifice, is called "feeding the Gods".[40]

Indeed, Mahayana itself marks a major step back towards Hinduism, not just because of its adoption of externals like the Sanskrit language and devotional rituals to a legion of divine beings, but in its basic spirit: it aims beyond the monk's individual salvation (the concern of Theravada Buddhism as of Jainism) to universal salvation for all monks, laymen and other beings, thereby restoring the central Hindu value of *responsibility* for the world.[41]

Sir John Woodroffe, a British apologist of Hinduism (as in his book *Is India Civilized?*), observed: "There are then based on this common foundation three main religions, Brahmanism, Buddhism and Jainism. Of the second, a great and universal faith, it has been said that, with each fresh acquirement of knowledge, it seems more difficult to separate it from the Hinduism out of which it emerged and into which (in Northern Buddhism) it relapsed. This is of course not to say that there are no differences between the two, but that they share in certain general and common principles as their base."[42]

Even if Buddhism originally constituted a break-away from the established religion in some respects, it was inevitable that it would assimilate much of Hinduism, for the simple reason that it recruited its monks in a Hindu environment: "From the very beginning the Order contained

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[40] See R.K. Payne: *The Tantric Ritual of Japan. Feeding the Gods: the Shingon Fire Ritual.*

[41] I thank Kedar Nath Mishra, my philosophy professor at BHU, for pointing out how the distinctive features of Hindu ethics and social philosophy can be deduced from the central value of responsibility, which sets Hinduism (along with Confucianism) apart from Jainism and Theravada Buddhism.

[42] John Woodroffe (originally under pseudonym Arthur Avalon): *Shakti and Shakta*, p.5.

Brahmins who might have renounced caste but retained their intellectual traditions. The current Brahmin ideology (not ritual or cults) was often taken for granted, just as the Brahmins had given up beef-eating and accepted non-killing (*ahiṁsâ*) as their main philosophy. The higher philosophies of both Buddhist and Brahmin began to converge in essence."[43]

The replacement of Pali with Sanskrit as the language of Mahayana Buddhism is an excellent illustration of this tendency. Most Buddhist philosophers (e.g. Nagarjuna, Vasubandhu, Asanga, Ashvaghosha) were born Brahmins.

With that, we have only admitted that Buddhism has been *influenced* by Hinduism. The fact that Buddhism moved closer to Hinduism does not prove that Buddhism itself is essentially Hindu, rather the opposite: if it could move closer, it was because its basic position was substantially different from Hinduism. If it is merely a question of influence, then the Buddhists might choose to emphasize the separate identity of Buddhism by "purifying Buddhism of its Hindu accretions" in a kind of Buddhist Tabligh campaign.[44]

This way, a Hindu effort to win Buddhists over to a recognition of the basic Hindu character of Buddhism would be hurt rather than helped by highlighting the influence which Hinduism has exerted on later Buddhism. The intellectually and strategically more important question is therefore whether there is a fundamental doctrinal kinship between Hinduism and Buddhism, not one of external influence but one inherent in the Buddha's own teachings, so that Buddhism can be described as merely one branch of Hinduism.

The question is definitely answered in the affirmative by most anglicized Hindus in the 20th century. Speaking to a largely Buddhist audience, Mahatma Gandhi declared that "the essential part of the teachings of Buddha now forms an integral part of Hinduism. (...) It is my fixed opinion that the teaching of Buddha found its full fruition in India, and it could not be otherwise, for Gautama was himself a Hindu of Hindus. He was saturated with the best that was in Hinduism, and he gave life to some of the teachings that were buried in the Vedas and which were overgrown with weeds. (...) Buddha never rejected Hinduism, but he broadened its base. He gave it a new life and a new interpretation."[45]

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[43] D.D. Kosambi: *Ancient India*, p.179.

[44] *Tabligh* = "propaganda", viz. of pure Islam among nominal Muslims to eliminate their lingering Pagan customs.

However, the first sentence could be interpreted as contradicting the rest, for it seems to be saying that Hinduism has incorporated Buddhist doctrine as if it was imported from outside. Another problem is that Gandhi had a theistic conception of Hinduism, which constitutes a fundamental difference with agnostic Buddhism.

In the same vein, Dr. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, President of India and a typical Congress Brahmin, has written: "Buddhism is only a later phase of the general movement of thought of which the Upanishads were earlier [expressions]. Buddha did not look upon himself as an innovator, but only a restorer of the way of the Upanishads."[46] This may be more defensible, in that Upanishadic philosophy, like Buddhism and unlike Gandhi's Vaishnavism, is not theocentric.

An oft-quoted Orientalist support for this position was given by Dr. T.W. Rhys-Davids, who had conformed to the modern interpretation of Buddhism as original and subversive, yet had observed: "We should never forget that Gautama was born and brought up a Hindu and lived and died a Hindu. His teaching, far-reaching and original as it was, and really subversive of the religion of the day, was Indian throughout (...) He was the greatest and wisest and best of the Hindus."[47]

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[45] Speech delivered in Colombo in 1927, quoted by Gurusevak Upadhyaya: *Buddhism and Hinduism*, p.iii.

[46] Radhakrishnan: *Indian Philosophy*, vol.2, p.469.

[47] T.W. Rhys-Davids: *Buddhism*, p.116-117, quoted in D. Keer: *Ambedkar*, p.522.

On the occasion of the celebration of the 2500th anniversary of the Buddha's enlightenment (disregarding the uncertainty among historians about the Buddha's dates)[48], and coinciding with the mass-conversion of Mahar Untouchables to Buddhism led by Dr. Ambedkar, Prof. V.S. Jha, Vice-Chancellor of Benares Hindu University, wrote the preface to the book *Buddhism and Hinduism* by Gurusevak Upadhyaya, "who reminds Hindu readers, in particular, of the Brahmanical roots of Buddhism on the one hand and its impact on the shaping of Hinduism throughout the centuries, on the other". The BHU Vice-Chancellor gave as his own judgment that "the essential message of the Buddha constitutes not a 'different' religion but forms an integral part of Hinduism itself, supplying to it the dynamism needed for continuous self-criticism and self-purification".[49]

Leading spokesmen of Buddhism may complete our parade of witnesses to the essential unity of Hinduism and Buddhism. The Dalai Lama has said: "When I say that Buddhism is a part of Hinduism, certain people criticize me. But if I were to say that Hinduism and Buddhism are totally different, it would not be in conformity with truth."[50] It is no coincidence that the Dalai Lama has attended a number of Sangh Parivar events, e.g. the VHP's second World Hindu Conference in Allahabad in 1979.[51]

Likewise, the 5th European Hindu Conference in Frankfurt featured a speech by Bhikkhu Jnana Jagat, Buddhist member of the Bodh Gaya temple management committee and of the VHP. He presented the standard VHP viewpoint on Buddhism, viz. that "from time immemorial the 'Vedic culture' and 'Shramana (ascetic) culture' have been growing and flourishing simultaneously in this land. Both being the integral part of the same Aryan culture or way of life have been enriching and sustaining each other through centuries."[52] It is all a bit vague, but hard to refute.

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[48] Vide Heinz Bechert, ed.: *When Did the Buddha Live? The Controversy on the Dating of the Historical Buddha*, and Sriram Sathe: *Dates of the Buddha*.

[49] In Gurusevak Upadhyaya: *Buddhism and Hinduism*, Foreword, dated 8 Nov. 1956.

[50] Interview in *Organiser*, 22-11-1992.

[51] Lise McKean: *Divine Entreprise*, p.104. She comments: "Whatever his political motivation, the Dalai Lama's appearance on this platform supports the VHP's assertions concerning its embrace of Jain, Sikh and Buddhist groups."

10.6. Vivekananda on the Buddha

In contrast with the Arya Samaj's rather bitter criticism of Buddhism, the trend among urban, vaguely anglicized Hindus throughout the 20th century is to glorify the Buddha without measure, and to consider Buddhism a branch of Hinduism with which Hindus have no quarrel. This embracing of Buddhism is strongly present in the Hindutva movement as well. A trend-setting example was Swami Vivekananda's fondness of the Buddha as attested by his own most famous speeches and by his associates.

Swami Vivekananda's close associate Sister Nivedita testifies that Swamiji was a great devotee of the Buddha: "Again and again he would return upon the note of perfect rationality in his hero. Buddha was to him not only the greatest of Aryans but also 'the one absolutely sane man' that the world had ever seen. How he had refused worship! (...) How vast had been the freedom and humility of the Blessed One! He attended the banquet of Ambapali, the courtesan. Knowing that it would kill him, but desiring that his last act should be one of communion with the lowly, he received the food of the pariah, and afterwards sent a courteous message to his host, thanking him for the Great Deliverance. How calm! How masculine! (...) He alone was able to free religion entirely from the argument of the supernatural, and yet make it as binding in its force, and as living in its appeal, as it had ever been."[53] Sister Nivedita also relates that Swamiji's first act after taking Sannyas was to "hurry to Bodh Gaya, and sit under the great tree"; and that his last journey, too, had taken him to Bodh Gaya.[54]

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[52] Bhikkhu Jnana Jagat: "Contribution of Buddhism to Indian Culture", *5th European Hindu Conference* (conference souvenir volume), p.57.

Before we move on to some direct quotations from Vivekananda's own works, we comment on this rendering of his thoughts by his pupil Sister Nivedita, if only because it is entirely representative of the line taken by Swamiji's organized following, the Ramakrishna Mission. The first remarkable thing is the superlatives. Even if we allow for the greater tendency to use exclamation marks and inflated superlatives typical of the age, the fact remains that no Hindu religious teacher, from Rishi Yajnavalkya to Shankaracharya and down to Sant Tulsidas, has ever been lauded in such strong terms by either Swami Vivekananda or any of his pupils. This unquestioning idealization of the Buddha is entirely typical of modern Hinduism, both in anti-religious circles, where he is hailed as a "rationalist", and in Hindu Renaissance movements such as Vivekananda's own Ramakrishna Mission and the following of Sri Aurobindo.

The one paragraph which we have just quoted is packed with modern myths or at least fashionable notions about the Buddha. The Buddha's "perfect rationality" would probably not be conceded by rationalists when they read about the Buddha's perception of seductive nymphs (sent by the Gods to distract him) when meditating under the Bodhi Tree, or with his claim of knowing all his previous incarnations. Still, the point is well taken: it is true and commendable that the Buddha, like Confucius, chose to keep metaphysical speculation outside his discourse, on the pragmatic plea that life is too short for sterile pursuits which distract our attention from those fields of interest where genuine knowledge and liberating action are within man's reach.

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[53] Sister Nivedita: *The Master as I Saw Him*, p.210-211.

[54] Sister Nivedita: *The Master*, p.215. *Sannyâsa*: vow of renunciation.

and of the VHP. He presented the standard VHP viewpoint on Buddhism, viz. that "from time immemorial the 'Vedic culture' and 'Shramana (ascetic) culture' have been growing and flourishing simultaneously in this land. Both being the integral part of the same Aryan culture or way of life have been enriching and sustaining each other through centuries."[52] It is all a bit vague, but hard to refute.

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[52] Bhikkhu Jnana Jagat: "Contribution of Buddhism to Indian Culture", *5th European Hindu Conference* (conference souvenir volume), p.57.

Before we move on to some direct quotations from Vivekananda's own works, we comment on this rendering of his thoughts by his pupil Sister Nivedita, if only because it is entirely representative of the line taken by Swamiji's organized following, the Ramakrishna Mission. The first remarkable thing is the superlatives. Even if we allow for the greater tendency to use exclamation marks and inflated superlatives typical of the age, the fact remains that no Hindu religious teacher, from Rishi Yajnavalkya to Shankaracharya and down to Sant Tulsidas, has ever been lauded in such strong terms by either Swami Vivekananda or any of his pupils. This unquestioning idealization of the Buddha is entirely typical of modern Hinduism, both in anti-religious circles, where he is hailed as a "rationalist", and in Hindu Renaissance movements such as Vivekananda's own Ramakrishna Mission and the following of Sri Aurobindo.

The one paragraph which we have just quoted is packed with modern myths or at least fashionable notions about the Buddha. The Buddha's "perfect rationality" would probably not be conceded by rationalists when they read about the Buddha's perception of seductive nymphs (sent by the Gods to distract him) when meditating under the Bodhi Tree, or with his claim of knowing all his previous incarnations. Still, the point is well taken: it is true and commendable that the Buddha, like Confucius, chose to keep metaphysical speculation outside his discourse, on the pragmatic plea that life is too short for sterile pursuits which distract our attention from those fields of interest where genuine knowledge and liberating action are within man's reach.

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[53] Sister Nivedita: *The Master as I Saw Him*, p.210-211.

[54] Sister Nivedita: *The Master*, p.215. *Sannyâsa*: vow of renunciation.

Some of the idealization of the Buddha reported by Sister Nivedita goes beyond what would be acceptable to modern tastes. Thus, to say that the aged Buddha "knew" that the pork (or the "pig's meat", meaning the sweet potato normally eaten by pigs) offered to him by the pariah "would kill him", is a typical attribution of omniscience to a Guru; the phenomenon can still be witnessed among contemporary adepts of various Gurus. It is a dubious honour to die willingly of a perfectly avoidable cause such as food poisoning, merely for the sake of "communion with the lowly". If this were the case (more probably it is a projection of modern social concerns), did the Buddha not apprehend that others present would die along with him from the same cause? Or did he consider that the normal fate of the "lowly"? Or should we accept that in his omniscience, he had foreseen the effect of this food on every other participant in the meal as well? At any rate, all this supernatural omniscience seems to be in contradiction with Sister Nivedita's next claim, which is in the modernist mode again: that he "was able to free religion entirely from the argument of the supernatural".

Sister Nivedita's rendering of Swami Vivekananda's position is only sketchy, but so is the understanding of Vivekananda by the millions of Hindus who consider him to be one of the greatest exponents of Hinduism. No wonder, then, that the words of praise to the Buddha just quoted are now the commonplace view of the Buddha among urban Hindus whose convictions are strongly influenced by modern Gurus like Vivekananda.

10.7. Sages of old eclipsed by the Buddha

A point only raised in passing by Vivekananda, but quite fundamental to an understanding of the position of Buddhism vis-à-vis Hinduism, concerns the centrality of the Buddha's person. That the Buddha "refused worship"[55] sounds good to us anti-authoritarian moderns, but it is hardly unique, and presenting it as unique is unfair to Hindu tradition. In pre-Buddhist scripture, we find very little "worship" of human religious figures, e.g. we never find Rama "worshipping" his Guru Vasishtha. Fact is that the focusing of a religious tradition in a single person (who was subsequently deified, with the Gods as his servants) is not attested in Vedic literature, which is *apaurusheya*, "impersonal", part of a hoary tradition not attributed to any single individual. Symbols of the Vedic religion include fire, the starry sky, the Aum sound, the swastika, but not any individual; by contrast, the central symbol of Buddhism is the Buddha.

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[55] Vivekananda quoted by Sister Nivedita: *The Master as I Saw Him*, p.210.

Buddhism is, in spite of its claims to universalism and rationality, a pioneer of the *paurusheya*, "person-centred" traditions; in this respect, it is a forerunner of Christianity, which deifies Jesus, and of Islam, where Mohammed as the *mard-i-kâmil* (Persian-Urdu: "accomplished man", model man) eclipses the entire earlier history of his people (denounced as *jâhilîya*, "age of ignorance"). In fact, Buddhism does one better, for while Christianity and Islam still present their own divinely revealed messages against the background of the tradition of Biblical prophets, Buddhist scriptures carry practically no references to the Vedic or any other pre-existing traditions, except negative ones. Their world starts with the Buddha's awakening and his *dharma-chakra-pravartana* ("setting in motion the wheel of Buddhism"), and what little of earlier history Buddhists admit into their intellectual horizon (e.g. the stories of the Buddha's previous lives) serves exclusively as prefiguration or preparation of these strictly Buddhist events.

It is quite possible that the followers have done injustice to the Buddha by worshipping him, that they have disobeyed him by making him the exclusive horizon of their religious consciousness. At that point, we are faced with limitations of historical knowledge similar to those surrounding the genesis of Christianity (did Jesus intend to found a new religion separate from Judaism?), and there is no point in making unverifiable claims about "what the Buddha *really* said". In the eyes of his followers at any rate, Siddhartha Gautama, more thoroughly than Jesus and Mohammed, eclipsed all sources of inspiration anterior to his own mission.[56]

In all three cases, the doctrines and ethics (in the case of Islam even the civil law system) by which their followers live are entirely linked with the founders, whether historically springing from them and their immediate associates or unhistorically attributed to them by later authorities. This is not to deny that the positions of the Buddha, the Christ and the Prophet are different ones within their respective traditions, merely to draw attention to the near-monopoly of these three individuals on the ethical and spiritual horizons of their followers, an individual monopoly quite without parallel in the Vedic or in the ancient Greek religion. It is only in post-Buddhist Hinduism that historical figures (or even metahistorical Gods) acquire a remotely similar monopoly, e.g. the pre-Buddhist characters Rama and Krishna only become objects of worship in the post-Buddha period if we accept the modern dating of Ramayana and Mahabharata which presents both Rama and Krishna as Avataras of Vishnu.

On the other hand, the worship of the Buddha admits of a different interpretation, in keeping with the Hindu tradition of Gurudom.[57] "Guru worship" is usually disparaged as the ultimate in idol worship and cultism, but informed Hindus reject this criticism. The Guru is venerated in his impersonal capacity as an embodiment of the realized Self; it is not the person but the universal Brahman which is venerated through him. Likewise, the Buddha who is venerated is not the individual Siddhartha Gautama, but the "Buddha nature" which Gautama, like other Awakened individuals before and after him, had realized.

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[56] This observation was suggested to me by Prof. Kedar Nath Mishra of the Philosophy Department at BHU.

[57] I thank Mrs. Yamini Liu for pointing this out to me. See also Swami Dayanãnda Saraswati (of Arsha Vidya Gurukulam, Coimbatore, no relation with the founder of the Arya Samaj): *The Teaching Tradition of Advaita Vedanta.*

Guru worship is expressive of that which, in the Hindu view, makes Hinduism superior to other religions: its tradition of techniques which make the "realization" of the Brahman in an individual possible. Most religions simply do not have ways to achieve this, do consequently not have *enlightened* masters through whom one can venerate the living Brahman; they can only talk about the divine but not bring it alive in a human being. All this, of course, on the Hindu-Buddhist assumption that what yoga achieves is not just some "funny feeling"[58] but a state of consciousness which really is radically superior to the ordinary. If this state of consciousness is indeed venerable, it is normal that lesser mortals, in preparation of their own ascension to this state (in this or a future life) venerate it through individuals who have realized it.

There is nothing exclusive about this "Guru worship": it is agreed that the Absolute Consciousness or Brahman is present in everyone, in the pupil or worshipper and in all sentient beings as well as in the Guru, and that it has been "realized" by numerous masters. At this point, however, the difference between Hinduism and Buddhism resurfaces. Hindus may hold it against the Buddha that he disturbed the world order by focusing exclusively on the "liberation from suffering" through meditation (implicitly disparaging the validity of all non-spiritual pursuits), but very few Hindus would deny the Buddha's genuine yogic realization and hence his rightful place in the pantheon of genuine Gurus. By contrast, judging from Buddhist scripture and from modern Buddhist publications, Buddhists whose horizon of realized spiritual masters includes non-Buddhist sages are rare.[59]

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[58] This is how the effect of yoga was described by an American Jesuit acquaintance, according to Ram Swarup: *Hindu View of Christianity and Islam*, p.45. Ram Swarup was describing what the Jesuit had said to Sita Ram Goel when he took the latter for a retreat. "Christian experience is not a funny feeling given by Yoga," he said.

The Hindu pantheon of sages is open-ended, and Hindu claims about the genuine self-realization of this or that particular Guru imply absolutely no denial of the spiritual merits of any other sage, whether Hindu or non-Hindu.[60] This may be true in theory for Buddhists as well, but in practice, Buddhists are less open to any input from outside their own tradition, less explicit in acknowledging the validity of other paths. In the Hindu endeavour of seeking and verifying any common ground between Hinduism and Buddhism, theory may be more important than practice: the Buddhist practice of isolating the Buddha from his historical context, viz. the Hindu institution of Gurudom, may simply be a temporary historical development which can be reversed by a closer study of the philosophical basis of Buddhism. It seems that in this respect, Hindu-Buddhist unity is a theoretically arguable proposition, but the de facto state of affairs suggests a more separate identity for Buddhism.

10.8. Vivekananda on Buddhist non-theism

A closer reading of Vivekananda merely confirms his veneration for the Buddha and his agreement with the Buddhist rejection of dualist theism. About the latter point, his Buddhist contemporaries themselves were not all in agreement, and Vivekananda's view that the Buddha was an

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[59] At this point, *sages*, who have earned spiritual merit by practising a yogic method (which, if non-Buddhist, would undermine the superiority if not unicity of the Buddha's method), must be strictly distinguished from *Gods*: the inclusion of Vedic and other Gods in the Mahayana Buddhist pantheon is well-attested, see Louis Frédéric: *Les Dieux du Bouddhisme* (French: "The Gods of Buddhism").

[60] The point can be argued further with reference to China: Taoist and folk-religious lore has absorbed many Buddhist characters and notions, while Chinese Buddhism (though having implicitly interiorized a certain Taoist *attitude*, esp. in Chan/Zen Buddhism) is much less hospitable to recognizably non-Buddhist inputs.

"agnostic" was criticized by his friend Dharmapala (of the Lanka-based Buddhist missionary organization, the Maha Bodhi Society, founded in 1891 and closely linked with the Theosophy movement), whom he is said to have helped with his speech at the Parliament of Religions. The two got estranged and by 1897 they were accusing each other of "undue malice". While Vivekananda remained a Buddha fan, the Maha Bodhi Society turned anti-Hindu and even rewrote its version of Buddhist history to minimize the role of Islam and maximize the role of Hinduism in the elimination of Buddhism from India.[61]

Regardless of his personal relations with Buddhists, Vivekananda explicitly goes along with what he understands to be the Buddhist argument against the reliance on a personal God: "Ay, the Buddhists say that ninety per cent of these vices that you see in every society are on account of this idea of a personal God; this is an awful idea of the human being that the end and aim of this expression of life, this wonderful expression of life, is to become like a dog. Says the Buddhist to the Vaishnava, 'If your ideal, your aim and goal is to go to the place called Vaikuntha where God lives, and there stand before Him with folded hands all through eternity, it is better to commit suicide than do that.' (...) I am putting these ideas before you as a Buddhist just for the time being, because nowadays all these Advaitic ideas are said to make you immoral, and I am trying to tell you how the other side looks."[62]

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[61] Related in Amiya P. Sen: *Hindu Revivalism in Bengal*, p.333-335.

[62] Vivekananda: *Lahore Address* (1897), p.33. The part about Advaita being linked with immorality seems to be referring to the Christian missionary polemic which derives morality from belief in a personal God Who rewards and punishes, and which equates non-dualism (from modern materialism to Upanishadic monism: *Aham brahmâsmi*, "I am Brahma") with hubris and the refusal to submit to "God-given" rules of morality. The equation between belief in God and subjection to standards of morality was also made explicitly in 19th-century *anti-Christian* polemic in Europe, e.g. vulgarly in the motto *"ni Dieu ni maître"* (French: "neither God nor master"), or in Friedrich Nietzsche's deriving the demise of morality from the "death of God".

In this case, the claimed Buddhist objection against the theistic goal of eternally being *with* God in Heaven is also the Advaitic objection: both Buddhism and Advaita Vedanta aim for total emancipation from the relative and fleeting world, and refuse to settle for a lesser goal such as being "with" (i.e. still separate from) the Divine. It must be admitted that the vast majority of Hindus have no conception of spiritual achievement beyond being "with" their chosen deity. The same is true for popular devotional Buddhism, where the agnostic yogic radicalism is replaced with reliance on quasi-deities (Amitabha, Guan Yin, etc.). Here again, what may superficially seem as a contrast between Hinduism and Buddhism is in fact an internal contrast within both Buddhism and Hinduism, viz. between radical philosophies of liberation and popular devotional attitudes.

Vivekananda also reiterates the atheist argument against the doctrine of Creation by a divine Person: "We have seen first of all that this cannot be proved, this idea of a Personal God creating the world; is there any child that can believe this today? Because a Kumbhakara creates a Ghata, therefore a God created the world!"[63] In other words: from the fact that all phenomena within the cosmos have been caused or created, it doesn't follow that the cosmos as a whole was likewise caused or created by an external agent.

This atheist skepticism forms a bridge between ancient non-theist philosophy and modern rationalism: "Has ever your Personal God, the Creator of the world, to whom you cry all your life, helped you?—is the next challenge from modern science." And back to ancient non-theism: "And we have seen that along with this idea of a Personal God comes tyranny and priestcraft. Tyranny and priestcraft have prevailed wherever this idea existed, and until the lie is knocked on the head, say the Buddhists, tyranny will not cease."[64] Here, Vivekananda fulfils his self-appointed role as herald of modernity and of the implicit modernity *avant la lettre* (universalism, non-theism, rejection of irrational belief) of ancient philosophies including Vedanta and Buddhism.

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[63] Vivekananda: *Lahore Address*, p.33. *Kumbhakâra* = "potter"; *ghaṭa* = "pot".

[64] Vivekananda: *Lahore Address*, p.34.

Few modern Hindus follow Vivekananda in this radical rejection of theism: usually they make a superficial compromise between their families' traditional theistic beliefs and veneration for non-theistic thinkers including the Buddha, without thinking through the inherent contradiction. Thus, we can see Gandhiji's inclusion of Buddhism in Hinduism (as he understood it: Vaishnava theism) falters on this point:

"I have heard it contended that Buddha did not believe in God. In my humble opinion such a belief contradicts the very central fact of Buddha's teaching. He undoubtedly rejected the notion that a being called God was actuated by malice and like the kings of the earth could possibly be open to temptations and bribes (animal sacrifice) and could possibly have favourites. He emphasized and redeclared the eternal and unalterable existence of the moral government of the universe."[65]

This is an unconvincing way to paper over the stark difference between Gandhi's own devotional theism and the Buddha's self-reliant approach which had no place for devotions to or speculative discourse about God. Though the Buddhist canon seems to take for granted the existence of the Vedic Gods (plural!—monotheism was totally foreign to Buddhism)[66], they were not accorded any importance whatsoever in the Buddhist spiritual path. The Buddhist law of Karma, or what Gandhi calls "the moral government of the universe", is conceived as a Natural Law, not as the doing of a Divine Person.

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[65] Speech in Colombo quoted in Gurusevak Upadhyaya: *Buddhism and Hinduism*, p.iii. Gandhi had not studied Buddhism from its primary sources. He had a strong tendency to project his own beliefs on other faiths.

[66] In the 19th century, Westerners who contrasted Buddhism positively with polytheist Hinduism tried to force Buddhism into the mould of monotheism, a tendency strongly and rightly criticized by T.W. Rhys-Davids: *Buddhist Suttas* (vol.11 of F. Max Müller, ed.: *Sacred Books of the East*), p.164.

It is true that devotional theism has crept into Buddhism at a later stage, but Gandhi's claim is not about these later trends but about the Buddha himself. Gandhi's approach is quite typical of the rather hurried way in which anglicized Hindus try to dismiss doctrinal differences as peripheral and non-essential, without bothering to offer a proper analysis. The same superficial approach is in evidence in the Sangh Parivar, which is quite akin to Gandhi in its understanding of Hinduism.

10.9. Coomaraswamy on Hindu-Buddhist unity

When surveying the modern Hindu opinion on Buddhism, we cannot skip the contribution of Ananda Kentish Coomaraswamy. As he stayed aloof from politics and from Hindu activism, we do not want to include him in the Hindutva movement, yet we do choose to include him in this survey for the following reasons. Firstly, he was definitely an apologist of Hinduism, a defender of Hindu values and traditions (including the caste system) against the numerous misconceptions and prejudices common among the Western and anglicized-Indian audiences.[67] Secondly, his observations on the sameness and difference of Buddhism and Hinduism are so lucid and accurate, that we do not want to be without them when evaluating the often rather simplistic evaluations of a Vivekananda or a Savarkar.

We need not postpone a judgment on the question whether, or to what extent, Buddhism is part of Hinduism, as it is rather simple to solve; or so, at least, Coomaraswamy teaches us. For an initial general judgment: "There is no true opposition of Buddhism and Brahmanism, but from the beginning one general movement, or many closely related movements. The integrity of Indian thought, moreover, would not be broken if every specifically Buddhist element were omitted; we should only have to say that certain details had been less adequately elaborated or less emphasized. (...) [The Buddha] in a majority of fundamentals does not differ from the Atmanists, although he gives a far clearer statement of the law of causality as the essential mark of the world of Becoming. The greater part of his polemic, however, is wasted in a misunderstanding."[68] The "misunderstanding" concerns the seeming opposition between the Upanishadic notion of Self (*âtman*) and the Buddhist doctrine of Non-Self (*anatta/ anâtman*).

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[67] For a radical example: in *The Bugbear of Literacy* (first published two years after his death, in 1949), A.K. Coomaraswamy questions the supreme importance which Western educationists attach to literacy.

Coomaraswamy explains that "the distinction appeared clear enough to Gautama and his successors; but this was largely because the Brahmanism against which they maintained their polemic was after all merely the popular aspect of Brahmanism. From a study of the Buddha's dialogues it would appear that he never encountered a capable exponent of the highest Vedantic idealism, such a one as Yajnavalkya or Janaka (...) It appeared to Gautama and his followers then and now that the highest truths—especially the truth embodied by Buddhists in the phrase *Anatta*—lay rather without than within the Brahmanical circle".[69] To Coomaraswamy, however, the same truth was present in the Upanishads, "where the truth was held, that the Atman is 'not so, not so'".[70]

A misunderstanding arises when people are using the same word but with a different meaning: "At first sight nothing can appear more definite than the opposition of the Buddhist *An-atta*, 'no-Atman', and the Brahman *Atman*, the sole reality. But in using the same term, *Atta* or *Atman*, Buddhist and Brahman are talking of different things, and when this is realized, it will be seen that the Buddhist disputations on this point lose nearly all their value. (...) There is nothing, then, to show that the Buddhists ever really understood the pure doctrine of the Atman, which is 'not so, not so'. The attack which they led upon the idea of soul or self is directed against the conception of the eternity in time of an unchanging individuality; of the timeless spirit they do not speak (...) In reality both sides were in agreement that the soul or ego (*mânas, ahaṁkâra, vijñâna*, etc.) is complex and phenomenal, while of that which is 'not so' we know nothing."[71]

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[68] A.K. Coomaraswamy: *Buddha and the Gospel of Buddhism*, p.220.

[69] A.K. Coomaraswamy: *Buddha*, p.198.

[70] A.K. Coomaraswamy: *Buddha*, p.198.

The Self being pure subject, it cannot be the passive object of knowledge, and in that sense it is unknowable, but in a state of *kaivalya* ("isolation [of consciousness from its objects]", to use Patanjali's term) or *enstasis*, it is subject and object at the same time. By contrast, any specific functions of consciousness, such as sensorial perception, memory, imagination and ratiocination are—and this is what one comes to realize pretty early in meditation practice—*objects* of consciousness, arising and passing away, parading before the eye of consciousness like clouds in a windy sky. All these mental phenomena can be dismissed as fleeting phenomena, but sheer consciousness cannot: it is the sea on which the waves appear as temporary shapes, necessary as the permanent basis to make the momentary waves possible.

The classical Buddhist position that the Self is as temporary and "unreal" as the modifications of its contents (its ever-changing objects), can only be taken by someone who doesn't know the established meaning of the term "Self", one who doesn't know that consciousness itself is the Self, and that it underlies *any* state of consciousness including Bodhi, the Awakened state. But, Coomaraswamy observes, there was no dearth of people who had mistaken or non-Upanishadic notions about the Self (equating it with the body, or the brain, or the sense of individual identity, or a transmigrating personality complex called soul), and it is from such people that the Buddha acquired a mistaken understanding of the Self too:

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[71] A.K. Coomaraswamy: *Buddha*, p.199-200. *Mânas* = "mind", *ahaṁkâra* = "ego", *vijñâna* = "highest intellegence".

"Either Gautama was only acquainted with popular Brahmanism, or he chose to ignore its higher aspects. At any rate, those whom he defeats in controversy so easily are mere puppets who never put forward the doctrine of the unconditional Self at all. Gautama meets no foeman worthy of his steel, and for this reason the greater part of Buddhist polemic is unavoidably occupied in beating the air. This criticism applies as much to modern as to ancient exposition."[72]

The confusion need not be blamed on the followers, but may be traced to the Master himself: "The 'further shore' is a symbol of salvation used by both parties; in the *Tevijja Sutta* Gautama suggests that it is employed by the Brahmans to mean union with Brahma (in the masculine [= as a theistic conception of a Divine Person]), whereas he himself means Arahatta [= Enlightenment]. If he really understood the Atmanist position in this manner, it proves that he spoke without knowledge; if he assumed that this was the Brahman position for the purposes of argument, he was guilty of deliberate dishonesty. The latter view should not be entertained. But it is undeniable that Gautama's dialogue is largely determined by controversial necessity. The compilers of the *Dialogues* had to represent the Buddha as victorious in argument, and they succeed by setting up a dummy which it is easy to demolish, while the object of nominal attack, the Atman theory, is never attacked."[73]

Coomaraswamy describes the Non-Self doctrine as essentially a knot into which Buddhist debaters got themselves entangled by being too clever: "Gautama constantly accuses others of eel-wrigging, but in the

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[72] A.K. Coomaraswamy: *Buddha*, p.200.

[73] A.K. Coomaraswamy: *Buddha*, p.205-206. The relevant passage of the *Tevijja-Sutta* can be found in T.W. Rhys-Davids: *Buddhist Suttas*, p.170 ff.

Dialogues he adopts the same method himself. (...) words are interpreted in new senses. In particular, the word *atta* (Atman) is used in a different sense from that of the Brahman Atmanists, and thus an easy victory is secured by 'thinking of something else'. The coining of the term *An-atta* to imply the absence of a perduring individuality is a triumph of ingenuity, but it should not blind us to the fact that the perduring Atman of the Brahmans was not an individuality at all."[74]

Coomaraswamy concedes the greater systemic perfection of Buddhism as compared to the inspired poetry of the Upanishadic seers, but this does not decide the question of who is right and who is wrong: "It may readily be granted that Buddhist thought is far more consistent than the thought of the Upanishads. The Upanishads are the work of many hands and extend over many centuries; amongst their authors are both poets and philosophers. The Buddhist Dhamma claims to be the pronouncement of a single rationalist, and to have but one flavour. Gautama propounds a creed and a system, and it is largely to this fact that the success of his missionary activities was due. (...) No one will assert that the Upanishads exhibit a consistent creed. But the explanation of their inconsistencies is historical and leaves the truth of their ultimate conclusions quite untouched. (...) we find in point of fact that the essential thought of the Upanishads is never grasped by the Early Buddhists, and is sometimes but obscurely apprehended by modern exponents."[75]

It is not doubted that the Buddha attained the highest state of consciousness, or what he called Awakening; what is doubted, in fact confidently rejected, is that this state automatically confers other qualities, such as intellectual knowledge about rival philosophies and their jargon. As Agehananda Bharati wrote: "To be a mystic is one thing; to be perfect in the moral or any other field is quite a different thing;

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[74] A.K. Coomaraswamy: *Buddha*, p.206.

[75] A.K. Coomaraswamy: *Buddha*, p.206-207.

and these perfections are not learned by yoga techniques (...) any more than you learn loving your neighbours by playing poker or cello."[76]

So, in spite of an intellectual misunderstanding concerning the notion of Self, the substance of the Upanishadic and Buddhist spiritual paths remains essentially the same. The central point of agreement is the value and discipline of *non-attachment*:

"Implicit in Brahman thought from an early period (...) and forming the most marked features of later Indian mysticism—achieved also in the Mahayana, but with greater difficulty—is the conviction that ignorance is maintained only by attachment, and not by such actions as are void of purpose and self-reference; and the thought that This and That world, Becoming and Being, are seen to be one by those in whom ignorance is destroyed. In this identification there is effected a reconciliation of religion with the world, which remained beyond the grasp of Theravada Buddhists. The distinctions between early Buddhism and Upanishadic Brahmanism, however practically important, are thus merely temperamental; fundamentally there is absolute agreement that bondage consists in the thought of I and Mine, and that this bondage may be broken only for those in whom all craving is extinct. In all essentials Buddhism and Brahmanism form a single system."[77]

However, Buddhism is merely a single discipline, whereas Brahminism is conceived as all-encompassing. Buddhism is exclusively concerned with *moksha*, whereas Brahmanism has a vision concerning the other goals of life (*purushârtha*) as well: sensuous enjoyment (*kâma*), worldly success (*artha*), and playing one's part in the larger scheme of things (*dharma*). The latter notion means both doing the duties befitting one's status, qualities and station in life, and participating in the cosmic cycles through ritual (e.g. participating in the year cycle by celebrating the seasonal festivals, a cornerstone of every religion). There is no Buddhist Dharma-Shastra or Artha-Shastra, much less a Buddhist Kama-Sutra.

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[76] Agehananda Bharati: *Light at the Center*, p.179.

[77] A.K. Coomaraswamy: *Buddha*, p.221.

Thus, eventhough Buddhist art developed certain typical conventions, these were largely borrowed (e.g. the classic hairdo of Buddha statues was apparently adopted from Bactrian Indo-Greek art)[78], for there is no specifically Buddhist aesthetics springing from a Buddhist worldview. If "all is suffering", then beauty too is not worth pursuing, and aesthetics is of no concern to pure Buddhism.

As Coomaraswamy observes: "In comparing Buddhism (the teaching of Gautama, that is) with Brahmanism, we have then to understand and take into account the difference of the problem to be solved. Gautama is concerned with salvation and nothing but salvation: the Brahmans likewise see in that *summum bonum* the ultimate significance of all existence, but they also take into account the things of relative importance; theirs is a religion both of Eternity and Time, while Gautama looks upon Eternity alone. It is not really fair to Gautama or to the Brahmans to contrast their *Dharma*; for they do not seek to cover the same ground. We must compare the Buddhist ethical ideal with the (identical) standard of Brahmanhood expected of the Brahman born; we must contrast the Buddhist monastic system with the Brahmanical orders; the doctrine of Anatta with the doctrine of Atman, and here we shall find identity. (...) Buddhism stands for a restricted ideal, which contrasts with Brahmanism *as a part contrasts with the whole*".[79]

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[78] This is at least the generally accepted view: Buddhism was initially aniconic, then used non-anthropomorphic icons (the wheel, the Buddha's feet), and only started depicting the person of the Buddha when in contact with the Bactrian Indo-Greeks (3rd century BC), hence the borrowing. Others argue that Buddhism did use Buddha statues since its very beginning, as the evidence of various types "casts doubt on the practice of deliberate avoidance of Buddha images", according to art history Professor Susan L. Huntington: "Early Buddhist art and the theory of aniconism", *Art Journal*, winter 1990, p.401; this does not exclude borrowing of specific iconographic conventions.

10.10. Coomaraswamy on Hindu-Buddhist differences

Ananda Coomaraswamy concedes that Buddhism developed a more satisfactory systematization of certain Upanishadic ideas than the Upanishads themselves: "Gautama repudiates the two extreme views, that everything is, and that everything is not, and substitutes the thought that there is only a Becoming. (cfr. *Samyutta Nikaya*, xxii:90:16) It is due to Gautama to say that the abstract concept of causality as the fundamental principle of the phenomenal world is by him far more firmly grasped and more clearly emphasized than we find it in the early Upanishads; nevertheless the thought and the word 'Becoming' are common to both, and both are in agreement that this Becoming is the order of the world, the mark of organic existence, from which Nibbana, or the Brahman (according to their respective phraseology) alone is free."[80]

In spite of this common view, a difference develops in its practical conclusions: "Where a difference of outlook appears is in the fact that the Buddha is content with this conclusion, and condemns all further speculation as [unedifying]; and thus, like Sankara, he excludes for ever a reconciliation of eternity and time, of religion with the world."[81]

Shankara (ca. AD 800) was the Vedantin who polemicized against Buddhism but at the same time incorporated a lot of Buddhist thought, so that he is often described as a "crypto-Buddhist". Like the Buddha, he founded an order of monks vowed to celibacy, the act of world-rejection par excellence, a sin against the Vedic commandment to pay off one's debt (*riṇa*) to the ancestors by raising a family. In spite of philosophical differences between Shankara and the Buddhists, Shankara did introduce the Buddhist rejection of the world into Hinduism:

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[79] A.K. Coomaraswamy: *Buddha*, p.219. Emphasis mine.

[80] A.K. Coomaraswamy: *Buddha*, p.208. *Nibbâna* (Pali) = *nirvâna*.

[81] A.K. Coomaraswamy: *Buddha*, p.208.

"The same result is reached in another way by those Vedantins of the school of Shankara who developed the doctrine of Maya in an absolute sense (*Shvetâshvatara Upanishad* 4:9-10) to mean the absolute non-entity of the phenomenal world, contrasted with the only reality of the Brahman which alone is. This is one of the two extreme views rightly repudiated by Gautama, but there is agreement to this extent that both Gautama and the Mayavadins reject the unreal world of Becoming, either because it is inseparable from Evil, or simply because it is unreal."[82]

Though Shankara's influence in medieval and modern Hinduism is enormous, his position is greatly at variance with the Vedic and Upanishadic worldview:

"But the interpretation of the term Maya to signify the absolute nonentity of the phenomenal world, if it belongs to the Vedanta at all (which is to be doubted: the conception of the absolute nonentity of the phenomenal world is entirely contrary to many passages in *Brhadâranyaka* and *Chândogya*, as well as to the *Brahma Sûtra* 1:2, which asserts that 'Everything is Brahman' (...)), is comparatively late; and even in the Rigveda (10:90) we find another tnought expressed, in which the whole universe is identified with the 'Eternal Male' [= *Purusha*], afterwards a recognized symbol of the Atman. The same idea finds many expressions in the Upanishads, notably in the saying 'That art Thou'."[83]

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[82] A.K. Coomaraswamy: *Buddha*, p.208-209. *Mâyâ* is the magic force by which the Gods create the world, or, in Shankara's view, the *illusion* of the world.

[83] A.K. Coomaraswamy: *Buddha*, p.208-209. The translation "Eternal Male" for *Purusha* is rejected by some Hindus as yet another Western (perhaps even Freudian) imposition. As a Vedic term, *Purusha* means both "person" or "human being" and "male person", eventhough in modern Hindi usage it does mean specifically the male; the confusion between "male" and "human" is admittedly widespread, vide French *homme* or English *man*.

This, then, is the proper and original understanding of Upanishadic monism: that the relative and the absolute, the world of form and the formless, the sensorial world and the Brahman, are somehow two states of a single essence, both equally real. The distinctive Vedic vision, setting it apart from Shankara's or the Buddha's view, is that the world itself is also an expression of the Absolute state:

"There is thus asserted from two points of view an irreconcilable opposition of Becoming and Being, *Samsâra* and *Nirvâṇa*, This and That. Over against these extremes there appears another doctrine of the Mean, entirely distinct from that of Gautama which merely asserts that Becoming, and not either Being nor non-Being is the mark of *this* world. This other Mean asserts that the Sole Reality, the Brahman, subsists, not merely as non-Becoming, but also as Becoming (...). In truth, there are two forms of Brahman, that is to say—'The formed and the unformed, the mortal and the immortal, the abiding and the fleeting, the being and the beyond'. (*Brhadâraṇyaka Upanishad* 2:3:1) The Brahman is not merely *nirguṇa*, 'in no wise', but also *sarvaguṇa*, 'in all wise'; and he is saved—attains Nirvana, knows the Brahman—who sees that these are one and the same, that the two worlds are one. (...) Here the phenomenal world is not without significance, but has just so much significance as the degree of our enlightenment allows us to discover in it."[84]

The similarity with the Mahayana-Buddhist Heart Sutra is more than superficial: "Emptiness is not different from form, form is not different from emptiness. What is form that is emptiness, what is emptiness that is form."[85] Here, Mahayana absorbs the Vedic vision, transcending the Buddhist dualistic view pitting emptiness (Nirvana) against form (equated with suffering). As in some other respects, Mahayana appears here as a partial return of Buddhism to its Vedic roots.

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[84] A.K. Coomaraswamy: *Buddha*, p.209-210.

[85] *Prajñâ-Pâramitâ-Hridaya-Sûtra, in E.B. Cowell, ed.; Buddhist Mahayan Texts p.153.*

10.11. Coomaraswamy on Buddhist world-negation

A practical consequence of the respective attitudes to involvement in the world is that Brahmanism values family life as the locus of the continuation of worldly existence, while Buddhism rejects it as merely a factor of more suffering. Like Saint Paul saying that the married state is but a way out for weak people, definitely inferior to celibacy ("to marry is better than to burn")[86], Buddhism extols celibate monkhood above the state of the householder, and makes the latter the *ancilla* of the former, viz. for providing novices and food to the monastic order. Actually, "the use of the term *kulapati* ('head of a family', householder) for a monk was considered to be an insult."[87] So, Coomaraswamy frowns upon this Buddhist value standard, which "is not really a middle path, and (...) remains, in contrasting the bright state of the Wanderer with the dark state of the Householder, if not all morbidly ascetic, nevertheless unmistakably a rule of abstention, rather than moderation."[88]

Coomaraswamy protests against this fundamental trait of Buddhism: "Gautama hardly contemplates the possibility that freedom may also be attained by those who are still engaged in worldly activities".[89] The aesthetician Coomaraswamy may understandably not be inclined to world-renunciation, but he ought to consider the possibility that achieving liberation through meditation is a full-time job, one which just happens to be factually incompatible with a worldly career. The latter may be worthwhile in a relative sense, and Coomaraswamy could certainly wax eloquent about the refined mental states needed for and developed by an artist's creative activity, but that is just not the same thing as the liberation achieved by silent meditation.

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[86] 1 Corinthians 7:9. Taking a lead from Christian Lindtner's thesis (briefly referred to in his "From Brahmanism to Buddhism", *Asian Philosophy*, 1999, p.37) that many of Jesus' sayings can be traced to still-extant Buddhist sources, we may speculate that the Christian introduction of an ideal of celibacy in the Jewish and Hellenistic world was another borrowing from Buddhism.

[87] Latika Lahiri: *Chinese Monks in India*, p.55.

[88] A.K. Coomaraswamy: *Buddha*, p.211.

[89] A.K. Coomaraswamy: *Buddha*, p.211.

On the other hand, Coomaraswamy acknowledges that the institution of celibate monkhood was by no means a Buddhist innovation; it already formed part of India's pre-Buddhist religious landscape. He quotes Hermann Oldenberg to support the view that the Buddhist institution of celibate monkhood, though certainly non-Brahmanical, was already a traditional and well-known institution in the Buddha's own day: "There was nothing in Buddha's attitude generally which could be regarded by his contemporaries as unusual, he had not to introduce anything fundamentally new; on the contrary, it would have been an innovation if he had undertaken to preach a way of salvation which did not proceed on a basis of monastic observances."[90] Such an "innovation" was preached in the Bhagavad-Gita, though on the basis of "the already old doctrine of the identity of This and That, Becoming and not-Becoming.(...) its essential thought is the recognition of Karma Yoga and Bhakti Yoga side by side with Jnana Yoga as 'means' of salvation."[91]

I venture to doubt that Karma Yoga (work free from attachment to the fruits of the work) and Bhakti Yoga (devotion) can yield the same spiritual results as Jnana Yoga (meditation). There is not necessarily *equality* between the different paths acknowledged as legitimate. On the other hand, the recognition of Karma and Bhakti as spiritual paths strengthens the ethical pluralism typical of Hinduism. As Coomaraswamy puts it:

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[90] A.K. Coomaraswamy: *Buddha*, p.211-212, with reference to Oldenberg: *Buddha*, English translation, 2nd ed. (1904), p.119. Coomaraswamy notes, however, that the *Anguttara Nikaya* (iii:451) mentions twenty-one *lay* Arhats, and that Gautama's father Suddhodana also counts as one.

[91] A.K. Coomaraswamy: *Buddha*, p.212. The date of the Gita is uncertain, but the dominant scholarly opinion puts its final version at several centuries after the Buddha.

"This Religion implies that each individual has to pursue a *dharma* determined by his station in life. This is the concept of *swa-dharma* (own-dharma) emphasized with great vigour in the Bhagavad Gita. The concept is based on the rejection of an absolutist standard of morality (...): 'In this conception of own-dharma there appears at once the profound distinction of Hindu from all absolutist moralities, such as the Mosaic or Buddhist.' The own-dharma is a form of morality appropriate to the individual according to his social and spiritual position."[92]

This way, Hinduism contrasts with Buddhism by having room for worldly pursuits along with the spiritual pursuit: "Thus it is that even laymen may attain to perfect freedom, in a life obedient to vocation, if only the activity be void of motive and self-reference.(...) Bondage and deliverance are alike to be found in the home and in the forest, and not more nor less in one than the other; everything alike is Holy (in terms of Buddhism, 'Void'), and men and women are not less so than mountains or forests. Above all, this reconciliation of religion with the world is but a Becoming, it has a meaning which cannot be fathomed by those who turn their backs upon it in order to escape from its pains and elude its pleasures."[93]

Here, the cleavage is not only between Buddhism and Brahmanism, but runs through Brahmanism itself: "Precisely the same crisis that we here speak of as distinguishing of Brahmanism itself (...) It has been held by Brahmans, as it had been also for a time assumed by Gautama, that salvation must be sought in penance (*tapas*) and in the life of the hermit. Gautama introduced no radical change in merely insisting on the futility of carrying such disciplines to a morbid extreme. (Perhaps we ought to say no change at all, for it would be difficult to point to any early or important Brahmanical text advocating a mental and moral discipline more severe than that of the Buddhist Brethren; on the contrary, the Upanishads constantly insist that salvation is won by knowledge alone, and that all else is merely preliminary.)"[94]

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[92] P.S. Shastri: *Ananda K. Coomaraswamy*, p.33, quoting Coomaraswamy: *Myths of the Hindus and the Buddhists*, p.10.

[93] A.K. Coomaraswamy: *Buddha*, p.213.

The extremism in discipline against which the Buddha reacted is better sought in Jainism, where it is well-attested: Mahavira Jina sought out the most extreme circumstances to live in, and till today Jain sadhus are known for their extreme penances. The difference between the two sects is perhaps best illustrated by the fact that Buddhists shave off their hairs while Jains pluck them out. Jainism claims to be much older than Buddhism, and unlike the neo-Buddhists, its apologists do not see their religion as a reaction against Brahmanism, but as an entirely original religion equally old as, if not older than the Vedic religion.[95] Fact is that Shramanism as a broader category predated Buddhism by centuries, and it must have included sects practising a severe asceticism, against which the Buddha reacted by establishing a more moderate path.

The Shramanic tendency was generally characterized by a rejection of the world, certainly of worldly responsibilities. This, then, certainly sets it apart from the Vedic worldview, with its celebration of worldly joys and its assumption of worldly responsibilities. Though both doctrines have borrowed from one another, as exemplified most sharply by the case of Shankara, and though they cannot be simply equated with Jainism and Buddhism on the one hand and Hinduism on the other, they certainly remain as two antagonistic poles in India's religious landscape.

10.12. Aurobindo on Buddhist pessimism

On the philosophical differences between Buddhism and Hinduism, Ananda Coomaraswamy has done the homework which the Hindu thinkers failed to do, or only did in a very sketchy way. On the other hand, he merely articulated in some detail a view which many Hindus vaguely subscribe to, and which they do not consider worthy of much exploration because it is just so obvious.

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[94] A.K. Coomaraswamy: *Buddha*, p.213.

[95] T.K. Tukol: *Compendium of Jainism*, p.10-20

One Hindu thinker who gave the matter some thought and expressed himself along the same lines as Coomaraswamy, is Sri Aurobindo. He blames Buddhism for its negative attitude to the world, and Shankara for importing the same into Hinduism and thereby transforming the Vedic message beyond recognition: "Ancient or pre-Buddhistic Hinduism sought Him both in the world and outside it; it took its stand on the strength and beauty and joy of the Veda, unlike modern or post-Buddhistic Hinduism which is oppressed with Buddha's sense of universal sorrow and Shankara's sense of universal illusion,—Shankara who was the better able to destroy Buddhism because he was himself half a Buddhist."[96]

Because of Shankara's Mayavadi views, most outsiders identify Hinduism as a "world-denying" religion. Aurobindo, however, contrasts Shankara-cum-Buddhist asceticism with Vedic life-affirmation: "The ancient Aryan culture recognised all human possibilities but put this *[viz. the spiritual life]* highest of all and graded life according to a transitional scale in its system of the four classes and the four orders. Buddhism first gave an exaggerated and enormous extension to the ascetic ideal and the monastic impulse, erased the transition and upset the balance. Its victorious system left only two orders, the householder and the ascetic, the monk and the layman, an effect which subsists to the present day. It is this upsetting of the Dharma for which we find it fiercely attacked in the Vishnu Purana under the veil of an apologue, for it weakened in the end the life of society by its tense exaggeration and its hard system of opposites."[97]

It is, indeed, often overlooked by modern Hindus claiming Buddhism as part of their own religion that there is a tradition of Hindu (or at least Brahmanic) polemic against

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[96] Sri Aurobindo: *India's Rebirth*, p.88.

[97] Sri Aurobindo: *Foundations of Indian Culture*, p.71.

Buddhism. Even the inclusion of the Buddha in the list of Vishnu's incarnations is not that innocent, as admitted here in one of the better manuals of Hindu doctrine:

"The Buddha is mentioned as one of the ten incarnations in several Puranas including Matsya, Varaha, Padma, Agni and Bhagavata. The Bhagavata Purana (1:3:24) says: 'When Kaliyuga sets in, the Lord will be born in Magadha as Buddha, son of Ajana, in order to weaken the enemies of the gods.' The Agni and Varaha Puranas state that the Lord was born as Mayamoha. Taking the form of a shaven-headed naked mendicant, the Lord deluded the demons so that they would give up the Vedic rituals and thus became powerless."[98]

So, his incarnation was only to deceive evil people, to weaken them by teaching them a false doctrine. The inclusion of the Buddha in the list of incarnations was only a way of rationalizing evil, viz. of explaining the success of a false doctrine as somehow useful in God's larger scheme. The falsity of Buddhism does not reside in its yogic aim and method, but in its depreciation of all non-yogic pursuits.

Aurobindo advocates a return to the spirit of pre-Buddhist Hinduism: "Ancient Hinduism aimed socially at our fulfilment in God in life, modern Hinduism at the escape from life to God. The more modern ideal is fruitful of a noble and ascetic spirituality, but has a chilling and hostile effect on social soundness and development; social life under its shadow stagnates for want of belief and delight, *shraddhâ* and *ânanda*. If we are to make our society perfect and the nation is to live again, then we must revert to the earlier and fuller truth."[99] He asserts that the genius of Vedic civilization was to see the divine dimension also in the world of form, in lay society, in arts and sciences; and that Buddhism was part of a movement of world-renunciation which over-emphasized the spiritual pursuit to the detriment of these other dimensions.

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[98] Sunita & Sundar Ramaswamy in Irene Schleicher, ed.: *Vedic Heritage Teaching Program*, vol.3, p.92.

[99] Sri Aurobindo: *India's Rebirth*, p.88.

In defence of Buddhism, then, one could argue that a temporary over-emphasis on the pursuit of Liberation was necessary, simply because there are technical aspects to it which require specialization. The science of yoga could never have been developed but for the work of people who dropped everything else and totally immersed themselves in this pursuit. If the belief that the world is nothing but suffering helped them to concentrate on their yoga practice, we could see that as at worst a useful mistake. And hopefully, the pioneering exploration of yoga by people like the Buddha may lead to the development of more efficient (less life-consuming) methods for achieving the same result.

That is more or less how modern Hindus justify the incorporation of the Buddha: he was a specialist of one discipline, viz. meditation up to the point of Liberation, just as others were specialists of grammar, astronomy, statecraft, temple-building or poetry. Neither his nor any of the other specialisms exhaust the essence of Hindu civilization, but they have all contributed indispensable elements to it.

10.13. Savarkar on Buddhist defeatism and treason

After these stratospheric philosophical observations, let us now move on to the down-to-earth political comments by Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, who devoted a few pages of his influential book *Hindutva* to Buddhism. Skipping all possible considerations of the Buddha's spiritual merits, he attacks Buddhism's lack of martial involvement in society, and its lack of nationalist identification with India. Shocked by his own candidness, he makes a few genuflections before the Buddha, but then reverts to his negative judgment.

Savarkar announces that he has the answer to a question which historians are still debating today: "We fear that the one telling factor that contributed to the fall of Buddhism more than any other has escaped that detailed attention of scholars which it deserves."[100] Our curiosity is aroused, and Savarkar assures us that the usual explanations, including "philosophical differences" and the "inanitation and demoralization of the Buddhistic Church", with Viharas attracting "a loose, lazy and promiscuous crowd of men who lived on others", are insufficient.[101] They would have been inconsequential "had not the political consequences of the Buddhistic expansion been so disastrous to the national virility and even the national existence of our race".[102]

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[100] V.D. Savarkar: *Hindutva*, p.18.

So, according to Savarkar, the downfall of Buddhism was due to a healthy reaction against certain morbid political implications of Buddhism. By implication, he joins hands with those secularists who allege that the downfall of Buddhism was the doing of Hindus rather than Muslims.

Savarkar illustrates the disastrous effect of Buddhism on the polity with an event from the Buddha's own life: "No prelude to a vast tragedy could be more dramatic in its effect in foreshadowing the culminating catastrophe than that incident in the life of the Shakya Sinha, when the news of the fate of the little tribal republic of the Shakyas was carried to their former Prince when he was just laying the foundation stone of the Buddhistic Church. He had already enrolled the flower of his clan in his Bhikkhusangha and the little Shakya Republic thus deprived of its bravest and best, fell an easy victim to the strong and warlike in the very lifetime of the Shakya Sinha. The news when carried to him is said to have left the Enlightened unconcerned."[103]

So far, so good: it is undisputed that the Buddha did not strongly intervene (he made some initial remonstrations but did not insist) to prevent the destruction of his own tribesmen.

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[101] It is well-established that Buddhist monasteries did acquire such a reputation, both in India and abroad, see John Stevens: *Lust for Enlightenment: Buddhism and Sex.* Thus, the caption under a sexually explicit Japanese painting (opp. p.93) reads: "*Buddhist monks and a nun misbehaving themselves.* In the Far East, Buddhist monks and nuns had a perhaps not undeserved reputation for lascivious behaviour."

[102] V.D. Savarkar: *Hindutva*, p.18.

[103] V.D. Savarkar: *Hindutva*, p.19. Shakya Sinha: "lion of the Shakya tribe", i.e. the Buddha.

These had angered Vidudabha, son of Prasenadi, king of Koshala: because of their caste pride, they had given an illegitimate daughter as a bride to the prince, withholding their legitimate daughters. But according to Savarkar, this unconcern about one's tribal or national welfare and sheer survival became the norm when Buddhism won the ruling class over to its own doctrines in most of India. The result was that "the woeful fate that had overtaken the tribal republic of Kapila Vastu befell the whole of Bharatvarsha itself and it fell an easy prey to the strong and warlike—not like [the] Shakyas to their own kith and kin, but [to] the Lichis and Huns."[104]

In effect, Savarkar accuses Buddhism of corrupting Indian culture in two distinct ways: by extolling non-violence, thus making Indians defenceless before more warlike enemies; and by propagating a universalist unconcern with the particularist interests of one's own family, tribe and nation. Savarkar contrasts the requirements of nationalism with Buddhist universalism, and claims history as his witness that in the past, Buddhism had already paralyzed people's patriotism to the point of making barbaric invasions possible:

"Thus it was political and national necessity that was at once the cause and the effect of the decline of Buddhism. Buddhism had its centre of gravity nowhere. So it was an imperative need to restore at least the national centre of gravity that India had lost in attempting to get identified with Buddhism."[105]

To take up Buddhism's alleged lack of patriotism first, this allegation is truly remarkable. The kings and soldiers of Buddhist countries like Sri Lanka, Thailand and Myanmar have never lacked in vigour when it came to defending their sovereignty against foreign invaders; witness the centuries of repeated wars between the Sinhalese people of Sri Lanka and invading armies from the several Tamil kingdoms. If the

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[104] V.D. Savarkar: *Hindutva*, p.19.

[105] V.D. Savarkar: *Hindutva*, p.28.

Buddhists had not fought, their states would have ceased to exist long ago.

Conversely, non-Buddhist kings in India are not known to have propagated "patriotism" to the extent of meriting contrastive comparison with the supposed "universalism" of Buddhist rulers. Most of them were rulers of kingdoms which covered only a small part of India, and the kings they fought were mostly fellow Indians. Admittedly, a notion of "India" (*Bhâratavarsh*) as a cultural unit was in the air, but this didn't keep them from fighting their neighbours, just like European kings were not much hampered in their military pursuits by the awareness that their neighbours belonged to the same Christian religion and cultural space. At this point, Savarkar is giving the lead in the Hindutva tendency to project modern nationalism onto ancient Indian history.

Savarkar hints at historical events involving Buddhism which would give proof of downright treason: "The reaction against universal tendencies of Buddhism only grew more insistent and powerful as the attempt to re-establish the Buddhist power in India began to assume a more threatening attitude. Nationalist tendencies refused to barter with our national independence and accept a foreign conqueror as our overlord. But if that foreigner happened to be favourably inclined towards Buddhism, then he was sure to find some secret sympathisers among the Indian Buddhists all over India, even as Catholic Spain could always find some important section in England to restore a Catholic dynasty in England. Not only this but dark hints abound in our ancient records to show that at times some foreign Buddhistic powers had actually invaded India with an express national and religious aim in view."[106]

One of these dark hints is explicitated: "We cannot treat the history of this period exhaustively here but can only point to the half symbolic and half actual description given in one of our Puranas of the war waged on the Aryadeshajas by the Nyanapati (the king of the Huns) and his Buddhistic allies. The record tells us (...) how the Buddhistic forces made China the base of their operations, how they were reinforced by contingents from many Buddhistic nations, and how after a tough fight the Buddhists lost it and paid heavily for their defeat. They had formally to renounce all ulterior national aims against India and give a pledge that they would never again enter India with any political end in view."[107]

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[106] V.D. Savarkar: *Hindutva*, p.25.

It would be wrong to dismiss a testimony simply because it is given in the Puranas, a notorious mixture of fact and fiction. All the same, the testimony cited by Savarkar is meagre, and the question remains to what extent even genuine facts have not been reinterpreted *post factum* in terms of the (possibly irrelevant) religious adherence of the parties involved.

In another book, *Six Glorious Epochs of Indian History*, Savarkar gives other instances of Buddhist treason. Starting with the well-known fact that the Greco-Bactrian and Kushana invaders adopted Buddhism, he speculates that they thereby attracted the loyalty and collaboration of native Buddhists. It would have been interesting if he had documented this allegation.

Along the same lines, but with decreasing credibility, he accuses the Buddhists of the same treasonous collaboration with non-Buddhist powers. He alleges that when Mohammed bin Qasim marched on Sindh in the early 8th century, "these Indian Buddhists were elated to see the Muslim foreigners march against the Hindu kingdom. These Buddhists, who bore malice towards the Hindus, perhaps thought that these new Muslim aggressors might embrace their Buddhist cult, as did their forerunners, the Greeks under Menander or the Kushans under Kanishka, and establish a Buddhist empire over India. So they went and greeted the Arabian-Muslim leader when he captured Port Deval from the hands of King Dahir."[108]

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[107] V.D. Savarkar: *Hindutva*, p.25-26. The ancient source quoted for this story is the *Bhavishya Purâṇa*, Pratisarga Parva.

Savarkar then imagines what the message they brought to Qasim sounded like: "We have nothing to do with Dahir and his Vedic Hindu cult. Our religious faith differs very widely from theirs. (...) Never suspect for a moment that we shall even enlist ourselves in King Dahir's armed forces or help him in any way. So we pray that the Buddhists should not be subjected to any indignities or troubles at your hands." And Qasim's reaction to this request "which amounted to complete surrender" was that he "gave them temporary assurance of safety".[109]

King Dahir fought but was killed and his army put to flight. Savarkar asks and answers the question: "But what were the Buddhists doing in this national catastrophe? At the news of the fall of King Dahir and the victory of the Muslims, these Buddhists began to ring bells in their vihars to greet the Muslim conquerors, and prayed in congregations for the prosperity of the Muslim rulers!"[110]

The translator, S.T. Godbole, has taken the trouble of authenticating Savarkar's claims in well-reputed history books.[111] Though some of these histories and translations are a bit quaint and could do with an update, they may be considered essentially trustworthy. At any rate, one cannot expect an amateur-historian like Savarkar to improve upon what was an accepted version of the facts among the professional historians of his day. These sources do give a semblance of confirmation to the allegation of a Buddhist role in acts of capitulation and collaboration, e.g. Al-Baladhuri mentions that "two Samanis, or priests" (apparently Shramanas, Buddhist monks) went all the way to Qasim's employer Hajjaj "to treat for peace".[112] However, the full sentence says that Qasim "went to Nirun, the inhabitants of which had already sent two Samanis, or priests, of their town to Hajjaj to treat for peace", meaning that the "Samanis" were representatives of the general will, not merely of Buddhist interests.

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[108] V.D. Savarkar: *Six Glorious Epochs*, p.133-134. Savarkar wrote this book in Marathi: *Bhâratiya itihâsâtîla sahâ sonerî pâne*; it was translated into English by S.T. Godbole.

[109] V.D. Savarkar: *Six Glorious Epochs*, p.134.

[110] V.D. Savarkar: *Six Glorious Epochs*, p.136. *Vihâra* = Buddhist monastery.

[111] Notably those by C.V. Vaidya, S.N. Dhar, A.L. Srivastava, Henry M. Elliot, M. Titus, and the original testimonies, the *Chach-Nâmah* and Al Baladhuri's *Kitâb Futûh-ul-Baldân*, both in English translation in H.M. Eliot & John Dowson: *History of India as Told by Its Own Historians*, vol.1.

To complicate matters further, the exact meaning of the Arabic rendering of Indian terms is ambiguous, starting with the meaning of *budh/budd/but*. As the Buddhists had been the first big producers of ornate sculptures for veneration, viz. Buddha statues, the word *but* became the standard Persian term for "idol", so an idol-worshipper was called *But-parast*, and an idol-breaker *But-shikan*, even when the idol was not a Buddha statue. Al-Baladhuri says that "the Indians give in general the name of *budd* to anything considered with their worship or which forms the object of their veneration. So, an idol is called *budd*."[113] Moreover, Al-Baladhuri also used "Budha" as a toponym: when an emissary of Hajjaj perished in the Indian frontier region, it was claimed that "he was killed by the Jats of Budha".[114] Likewise, is anything Buddhist involved when, according to a sub-title in the *Chach-Nâmah*, "Budhiman comes to Muhammad Kasim, and receives a promise of protection"?[115] In the circumstances, is it likely that the freshly arrived Arab chronicler could distinguish a category of "Buddhists" in the general population of Hindus?

Nevertheless, it is the established opinion among modern historians that the Buddhists did commit treason, e.g.: "His

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[112] Quoted in Elliot & Dowson: *History of India*, vol.1, p.121.

[113] Reproduced in Elliot & Dowson: *History of India*, vol.1, p.120.

[114] Or at least that is how Elliot & Dowson understood it: *History of India*, vol.1, p.119.

[115] Quoted in Elliot & Dowson: *History of India as Told by Its Own Historians*, vol.1, p.157.

[Qasim's] work was greatly facilitated by the treachery of certain Buddhist priests and renegade chiefs who deserted their sovereign and joined the invader."[116] On the other hand, even if specific cases of Buddhist treason can be substantiated, it is not excluded that non-Buddhist citizens were equally eager to be on the best possible terms with the probable victor. That much is indeed related by the Arabic sources pertaining to the period *after* the conquest: Hindus coming to Qasim's court to offer their surrender.[117] There is of course a difference between surrendering before the battle is joined and surrendering after the battle is lost; still, the Hindus who surrendered could instead have opted for emigration, civil disobedience, guerrilla warfare or plain martyrdom.

Here again, there is a semantic problem: the "one thousand Brahmans" who came to surrender are described as having "shaven heads and beards" and being "dressed in yellow clothes", the typical look of Shramanas. At that stage, the Arab-Muslim newcomers simply couldn't distinguish between Brahmins and Buddhist monks, all *But-parasts*, "idol-worshippers".

The explicitly religious hostility to the Hindus which Savarkar claims as the Buddhists' motivation is not in evidence in these sources. Even if Buddhists committed treason, the reason may have been opportunism and unwillingness to join the fight on any side (draft-dodging, so to speak), without implying any animus against their non-Buddhist compatriots. Yet, Savarkar puts all his cards on the hypothesis of an intense Hindu-Buddhist antagonism, coinciding with a nationalist-internationalist conflict of loyalties.

Whether historical or not, this view hardly fits in with the usual "Buddhists are Hindus" line of the organized Hindutva movement. On the contrary, it plays into the hand of a certain anti-Hindutva polemic, which pictures Buddhism as a movement of anti-Hindu revolt then groaning under Hindu oppression, and the Muslim invaders as liberators of those whom the Hindu regime oppressed, including the Buddhists.

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[116] R.C. Majumdar, H.C. Raychoudhary, Kalikinkar Datta: *An Advanced History of India*, p.172.

[117] E.g. in *Chach-Nâmah*, in Elliot & Dowson: *History of India*, vol.1, p.182.

One of the trend-setters of this view was M.N. Roy, founder of the Communist Party of India, who wrote: "Brahminical orthodoxy having overwhelmed the Buddhist revolution, India of the eleventh and twelfth centuries must have been infested with multitudes of persecuted heretics who would eagerly welcome the message of Islam.".[118] He does nothing to document this sensational claim, but it has become very popular nonetheless. Along the same lines, the leading Marxist historian Romila Thapar has said: "In an often horrible way, religious forms of expression like Buddhism and Jainism have been persecuted and even exterminated [by Hindus]. (...) The trauma for the Brahmins was that, in the time of the Moghuls, they were counted among 'the rest', i.e. the non-Muslims. Bad for them was also that Islam was more able to have a dialogue with the inheritors of Shramanism."[119]

When you consider that the establishment of Islam in the entire area from Iran to Ningxia and from Kazakhstan to Malaysia, including India, was followed by the complete disappearance of living Buddhism in each of these regions, you may wonder what Prof. Thapar's definition of "dialogue" could be. Even Moghul Emperor Akbar, who invited representatives of many religions to his court for discussion, did not invite any Buddhist representative simply because Buddhism did not exist in India at that time. Perhaps Prof.

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[118] M.N. Roy: *Historical Role of Islam*, p.81.

[119] Interview with Romila Thapar by Marc Colpaert in *Wereldwijd*, March 1986. There is no information about this "dialogue" in Romila Thapar: *A History of India*, vol.1, which covers the period when these religions encountered each other. On the contrary: "Buddhism and Islam, both being institutionalized, proselytizing religions, attracted the same potential following. This led to a strong antagonism between the two and the attacks on the monasteries resulted in an exodus of Buddhists from eastern India to south-east Asia." (p.263-264)

Thapar had the collaboration of the Jain merchants and jewellers with the Sultans in mind. The Jains, indeed, were better survivors than the Buddhists under Muslim rule.

Whatever the facts of history, Savarkar plays into the hand of the anti-Hindu polemicists by confirming their claim that Buddhism was hostile to Hinduism to the extent of collaborating with the Arab invasion. Fortunately, there is still some justice in this world, or at least in Savarkar's world, for the "Buddhist traitors" did not escape their karmic reward: "in spite of their traitorous solicitations of the Muslims, these 'Buddhaprasthees'—the idol-worshipping Buddhists who preached extreme non-violence—were violently exterminated from Sindh by the Muslim aggressors under Kasim, owing to their innate hatred for that sect."[120]

Savarkar links Buddhist non-resistance to the destruction of Buddhism: "But what they thus asked for as a boon proved to be an inexorable curse for them. After winning the final battle, when the Muslims rushed violently, like a stormy wind, through Sindh, they went on beheading these Buddhists even more ruthlessly than they did the Vedic Hindus. For, the Vedic Hindus were fighting in groups or individually at every place and so they struck at least a little awe and terror in the minds of the Muslims. But as there was no armed opposition in Buddhist Vihars and Buddhist localities, the Muslims cut them down as easily as they would cut vegetable. Only those of the Buddhists who took to the Muslim faith were spared".[121]

This development is vaguely hinted at in the Arabic sources (to be read with the semantic reservations outlined above), e.g. the *Chach-Nâmah* reports off-hand: "Muhammad Kasim built at Nirun a mosque *on the site of the temple of Budh*, and ordered prayers to be proclaimed in the Muhammadan fashion".[122]

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[120] V.D. Savarkar: *Six Glorious Epochs*, p.143.

[121] V.D. Savarkar: *Six glorious Epochs*, p.136.

[122] In Elliot & Dowson: *History of India*, vol.1, p.158; emphasis added.

Savarkar generalizes this explanation of the extermination of Buddhism in Sindh to explain its disappearance from India as a whole: "For the same reason and in the very same manner the Muslims went on liquidating the Buddhist pockets of influence as they advanced conquering province after province in India. (...) As most of the Buddhists showed, through fear of death, willingness to embrace Islam, they were all converted. Not a single Buddhist remained alive in the northwestern provinces like Gandhar, Kamboj and others (...) On seeing Bakhtyar Khiljee march on Bihar, several Buddhists took their religious books and fled to Tibet and China. The rest were polluted and taken over into the Muslim fold. (...) Nowhere can one find evidence to say that some Indian Buddhist army or some Buddhist organization fought with the Muslim invaders any battle worth the name."[123] The Buddhist establishment at that time consisted exclusively of monasteries, there was no Buddhist king left in India who could have made a distinctively Buddhist contribution to the military defence of India.

10.14. Savarkar on Buddhist non-violence

Veer Savarkar particularly disliked the glorification of non-violence, practised in his own day by Gandhiji, and attributed retrospectively to the Buddha as well:

"Buddhism has conquests to claim but they belong to a world far removed from this our matter-of-fact world, where feet of clay do not stand long and steel could be easily sharpened, and *trishna*/thirst is too powerful and real to be quenched by painted streams that flow perennially in heaven. These must have been the considerations that must have driven themselves home to the hearts of our patriots and thinkers when the Huns and Shakas poured like volcanic torrents and burnt all that thrived. (...) So the leaders of thought and action of our race had to rekindle their Sacrificial

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[123] V.D. Savarkar: *Six Glorious Epochs*, p.143.

Fire to oppose the sacrilegious one and to re-open the mines of Vedic fields for steel, to get it sharpened on the altar of Kali, 'the Terrible', so that Mahakal, the 'spirit of the time', be appeased. Nor were their anticipations belied. The success of the renovated Hindu arms was undisputed and indisputable. Vikramaditya who drove the foreigners from the Indian soil and Lalitaditya who caught and chastised them in their very dens from Tartary to Mongolia were but complements of each other. Valour had accomplished what formulas had failed to do."[124]

This is not meant to sound like naked militarism and glorification of armed struggle, so the cultural fruits of this martial spirit are also highlighted: "Once more the people rose to the heights of greatness that shed its lustre on all departments of life. Poetry and philosophy, art and architecture, agriculture and commerce, thought and action felt the quickening impulse which consciousness of independence, strength and victory alone can radiate."[125] This statement would imply that all these disciplines had been in a state of decay during the reign of Ashoka and other Buddhist rulers, a claim which we leave entirely to Savarkar's responsibility.

Sometimes, this attack on Buddhist non-violence is combined with a bit of polite lip-service to the Buddha: "As long as the law of evolution that lays down the iron command: 'immobile forces are the easy prey of the mobile ones, those with no teeth fall prey to those with deadly fangs; those without fangs succumb to those with hands, and the cowards to the brave' (Manu), is too persistent and dangerously imminent to be categorically denied by the law of righteousness whose mottos shine brilliantly and beautifully, but as the stars in the heavens do, so long as the banner of nationality will refuse to be replaced by that of Universality and yet, that very national banner hallowed as it is by the worship of gods and goddesses of our race, would have been the poorer if it could not have counted the Shakyasimha under its fold."[126] This, then, represents a fairly common attitude in Hindutva circles: to disparage Buddhism as a corrupting force through its promotion of non-violence, and at the same time praise the Buddha as a spiritual giant.

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[124] V.D. Savarkar: *Hindutva*, p.20-22.

[125] V.D. Savarkar: *Hindutva*, p.22.

It is nowadays commonly assumed that the rise of the ideal of non-violence (*ahiṁsâ*) in the Indian scale of values is due to the influence of Buddhism. You find this belief not merely in vulgarizing history books, but also in Veer Savarkar's seminal book *Hindutva*, as quoted, and other like-minded publications. Yet, the doctrine of non-violence definitely precedes Buddhism by centuries. It is in the Mahabharata that we repeatedly find the famous formula: *Ahiṁsâ paramo dharmaḥ*, "non-violence is the highest value/norm/duty/religion".[127] Then already, vegetarianism was a central application of the Ahimsa doctrine: the Mahabharata discusses 18 kings who have banned meat-eating and lists 30 kings who have refrained from taking meat themselves.[128] In that respect, Buddhism was a step backwards from ahimsa, for the Buddhist monks were allowed to accept meat if it was offered to them.

Centuries before the Buddha, in distant Afghanistan, the Iranian reformer Zarathushtra already preached non-violence (towards people, towards the cow, towards Mother Earth), and in this he was quite possibly only one spokesman of a trend that was catching on in various centres of Aryan culture.[129] The most extreme form of ahimsa, losing all sense of proportion, was to be found in Jainism, a tradition which by its own account is much older than the Buddha.

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[126] V.D. Savarkar: *Hindutva*, p.38.

[127] Adiparva 11:13, Anushasanaparva 115:1, 115:25, 116:38, Ashwamedhaparva 43:21. The subject-matter of the Mahabharata precedes the Buddha by centuries, but its final editing took place only centuries after the Buddha; as material kept on being added, it is admittedly difficult to date the historical information given in the epic, even to merely divide it in "pre-Buddhist" and "post-Buddhist".

[128] Anushasanaparva 115:59-67. In that context, Vyasa (or whoever wrote the epic) also claims that meat-eaters had introduced animal sacrifice into the Vedic *yajña*, so that this practice was not the original tradition but a degenerative trend. This may well be an ancient case of back-projection of contemporary values onto ancestral tradition.

To be sure, the ahimsa motive in this trend is more complex than we moderns might think. It is mixed with a new concept of purity: vegetarianism not only avoids killing, it also avoids taking dying substances into your body. Zarathushtra's prohibition of animal sacrifice not only avoided killing the animal victim, but also kept the sacred fire pure from the defilement which a dying victim brings. Ahimsa has a ritual and even a kind of hygienical aspect apart from its ethical aspect of compassion with all sentient beings. Certain inside observers explain both the ethical and the ritual valuation of ahimsa as a consequence of the spread of yogic practices, which develop people's sensitivity.[130]

Moving closer to the thought current to which Buddhism is most closely related, we find various notions of ahimsa in the Upanishads. One scholar mentions "an important but apposite passage in the *Brihadâranyakopanishad* (5:2:1-3), which uses three *da*-based expressions: *dâmyata* (have self-control), *datta* (give), *dayadhvam* (have compassion). The foundations for formulating *ahimsâ* as positive compassion (*dayâ*) have been laid here. There are good reasons for believing that this and other Upanishadic texts pre-date

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[129] "Earth is good, Zoroaster thought. (...) Already, with Zoroaster, the outline of an ecological ethic was being sketched", according to Cyrus R. Pangborn (*Zoroastrianism*, p.114-115), who also notes among Zoroastrian duties "nurture of plants [and] animals", "social peace" and "moderation" (*ibid.*). I consider the theory that Zarathushtra lived in the 6th century BC (by common chronology roughly contemporaneously with the Buddha, in Karl Jaspers' mythical *Achsenzeit* or Axial Age), as sufficiently disproven, see e.g. Pangborn: *op.cit.*, p.4.

[130] E.g. the late Ekkirala Krishnamacharya from Visakhapatnam, of the Theosophy-related World Teacher Trust, explained it this way in a lecture in Mechelen (Belgium) in 1982.

Buddha and Mahavira, so that the grounds of their insight have already been laid."[131]

Similarly, the *Chhândogya Upanishad* mentions ahimsa in several places, one of them being a list of virtues to be practised, including asceticism (*tapas*), generosity (*dânam*), uprightness (*arjavam*) and truth-speaking (*satya-vâchanam*): these virtues are said to be as necessary for the sacrifice as the fees given to the priests. Here, we are already close to the Buddha's "five precepts", one of which is ahimsa.[132]

The notion of ahimsa has even been traced to the Vedic sacrificers who, all while killing sacrificial animals, tried to do so with a minimum of suffering for the victim and with a specious explanation that this particular form of killing was not really killing.[133] Even in the performance of a violent act, the ideal of non-violence was already present. This unease about committing violence is already recognizable in the custom among primitive hunters to appease the spirit of the animal which they are about to hunt down. At any rate, it has been argued that the Shramanas "seem to have adopted non-violence from Brahmanic circles".[134]

The Buddha, a latecomer on the ahimsa scene, prescribed non-violence as one of the rules to which his followers should adhere. But he did not introduce it in secular affairs, the way Mahatma Gandhi introduced it as a technique of moral and political pressure. He never said that it was better to get killed than to kill; he simply stayed away from secular situations where killing took place. It is related several times that a king on his way to the hunting-ground or the battle-field took the occasion to meet the Buddha who was staying on his way to the battlefield at that time, but never did the Buddha admonish him to cancel his programme of violence, though he did preach against animal sacrifice, i.e. against violence in the *religious* sphere. Nor did he prescribe strict vegetarianism to his monks, because "beggars can't be choosers" and have to accept what generous laymen offer them.[135]

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[131] John G. Arapura: "Ahimsa in Basic Hindu Scriptures", *Journal of Dharma*, 1991/3, p.197-210, spec. p.199-200.

[132] *Chhândogya Upanishad* 3:17:4, 8:15:1. The five precepts (to which you are still expected to commit yourself when you take a Buddhist meditation course) are: truthfulness, non-violence, non-stealing, chastity, non-intoxication.

[133] Discussed in detail in Herman W. Tull: "The killing that is not killing: men, cattle and the origins of non-violence (*ahimsâ*) in the Vedic sacrifice", *Indo-Iranian Journal* 39 (1996), p.223-244, building largely on Hanns-Peter Schmidt: "The origin of *Ahimsâ*", in *Mélanges d'Indianisme à la Mémoire de Louis Renou* (Paris 1968).

[134] Herman W. Tull: "The killing that is not killing", *Indo-Iranian Journal* 39 (1996), p.223.

On the other hand, "right livelihood", one of the elements of the Noble, Eightfold Path, is definitely an injunction against professions in which the Buddhist rules of conduct are systematically violated. The permission for monks to accept meat is limited by the requirement that the animal must not have been slaughtered for the specific purpose of offering it to the monk. On the whole, we can say that the Buddha saw non-violence as a condition for his spiritual path, but not as a new law with which to govern the world; governing the world was a business which he as a prince had abandoned when he took up the search for Liberation. Moreover, he applied this principle with moderation, unlike the Jain monks who took it to absurd lengths (and even the Jains did not expect their kings to live by the rules of non-violence imposed on the monks). In Buddhist history, we don't see non-violence interfere with the normal exercise of power. Buddhist kings have not felt constrained to non-violence when it came to repelling invaders, and some have even waged wars of conquest.

Buddhism started as a Kshatriya religion and in a number of countries it has remained just that. In China, Buddhist monasteries like Shaolin were famous as centres of martial arts practice, particularly the "hard" variety (the gentler styles being more associated with Taoism). Bodhidharma, pioneer of Chan/Zen Buddhism, belonged to a martial caste from Kerala and is traditionally credited with bringing the Keralite martial arts to China.[136] In Japan, the Samurai class found in Zen Buddhism the best psychological basis for a life on the brink of death, a life of total obedience to the master who could send his men into slaughter and suicide missions at any time.[137] Buddhist non-violence remained an optional discipline for spiritual seekers and seldom interfered with the way of the world.

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[135] As I had the occasion to notice at the Tibetan Institute (deemed university) in Sarnath, Tibetan monks living in India, where (unlike in Tibet) vegetarian alternatives to meat are available in plenty, habitually eat meat.

It is therefore too simplistic, if not simply untruthful, to say that Buddhism robbed India of its fighting capability by imposing an ethic of non-violence. Even Jainism with its more extreme concept of non-violence has been the adopted religion of kings who were as harsh and aggressive as any. Rulers were left to practise the duty of the ruler, which could well include the use of force, along with amorous pursuits and other activities not befitting the monk. In this respect, Buddhism has abided by the Hindu tradition of separate duties and privileges according to station of life and status in society.

10.15. Savarkar on Ashoka

Like the Buddha, Ashoka is exempt from criticism in the official history books. Savarkar correctly observes that this is an innovation under Western influence: "We know that it could be easily pressed against this statement that the greatest and even the most powerful Indian Kings and Emperors known, belong to the Buddhist period. Yes, but known to whom?—to Europeans and those of us who have unconsciously imbibed not only their thoughts but even their prejudices."[138]

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[136] Vide Red Pine, tra.: *The Zen Teachings of Bodhidharma*, introduction.

[137] Vide e.g. Taisen Deshimaru: *The Zen Way to the Martial Arts.*

[138] V.D. Savarkar: *Hindutva*, p.20.

Effectively, before Orientalism and English education, most Hindus had never heard of Ashoka. He does not figure in popular stories as do Vikramaditya or Prithviraj Chauhan. It is the European glorification of Buddhism and the Christian sympathy for his conversion story (appalled at the slaughter in his own Kalinga war) which introduced Ashoka into the Hindu consciousness. As usual, Hindutva spokesmen don't try to beat the dominant school of thought, but readily join it. In this case, Savarkar joins the chorus of praise for Ashoka:

"There was a time when every school history in India opened from the Mohammedan invasion because the average English writers of that time knew next to nothing of our earlier life. Lately the general knowledge has extended backwards to the rise of Buddhism and we too are apt to look upon it as the first and even the most glorious epoch of our history. The fact is, it is neither. We yield to none in our love, admiration and respect for the Buddha, the Dharma, the Sangha. They are all ours. Their glories are ours and ours their failures. Great was Ashoka, the Devapriya, and greater were the achievements of the Buddhist Bhikkhus."[139]

The only amendment to the dominant view which Savarkar proposes, is to restore the perspective, viz. of similar non-Buddhist kings in far larger number and of no lesser merit: "But achievements as great if not greater and things as holy and more politic and statesmanly had gone before them and indeed enabled them to be what they were. So, we do not think that the political virility or the manly nobility of our race began and ended with the Mauryas alone—or was a consequence of their embracing Buddhism."[140] This is certainly a welcome corrective to Jawaharlal Nehru's highly selective and partisan vision of Indian history, which exalts Ashoka (along with Akbar) beyond all proportion.

In a later work, *Six Glorious Epochs of Indian History*, Savarkar has sharpened his criticism of Ashoka. He blames him for causing a degeneration of the martial qualities of the Indian people, illustrated by their declining capacity to deal with foreign invaders, from Alexander (327 BC) to Demetreos (ca. 200 BC):

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[139] V.D. Savarkar: *Hindutva*, p.20.

[140] V.D. Savarkar: *Hindutva*, p.20.

"How very strange it is that (...) brave Indian Kshatriyas, their republics, and soldiers and common populace had all defeated and repulsed (...) the aggressive Greeks under Alexander and Seleucos and drove them back, should now be overrun so very easily by the much weaker and degenerated Bactrian Greeks! Owing to the constant dread of the brave fighting warriors of India, Alexander and Seleucos could not sleep soundly in their military camps (...). But these second-rate Bactrian Greek military leaders could sleep soundly in the royal palace of Ayodhya (...) This Greek invasion took place within thirty to forty years of Asoka's adoption of Buddhism. (...) the reason why these inferior and weaker Greeks should conquer the Indians so very easily, was (...) that the Indian heroism and the Indian capacity to resist aggression must have deteriorated to a horrible extent."[141]

It seems that Ashoka's policies of non-violence have taken on mythical proportions in the minds of both his fans and his critics. It is unlikely that "heroism" and "the capacity to resist aggression" in the outlying northwestern provinces could have been affected this badly by the policy of an emperor in distant Pataliputra. It is not impossible that new research into this epoch of Indian history may discover a grain of truth in Savarkar's sweeping allegation, but this criticism of Ashoka remains illustrative of Savarkar's disproportionate focus on martial qualities, obviously related to his own youthful involvement in the armed fringe of the Freedom Movement.

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[141] V.D. Savarkar: *Six Glorious Epochs*, p.68-69.

11. Are neo-Buddhists Hindus?

11.1. The challenge of Ambedkarite neo-Buddhism

On 2 October 1956, two months before his death, the former Law Minister Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar led several hundreds of thousands of followers, mostly belonging to his own ex-untouchable Mahar caste, into conversion to Buddhism.[1] He extracted twenty-two promises from his followers. We will list them here with their original numbers but regrouped in two categories. The first category consists of positive expressions of commitment to the Buddhist way:

"7) I will never act against the tenets of Buddhism;

"11) I will follow the Eight-fold Path of Lord Buddha;

"12) I will follow the ten *Paramitas* of the *Dhamma*;[2]

"13) I will have compassion on all living beings and will try to look after them;

"14) I will not lie;

"15) I will not commit theft;

"16) I will not indulge in lust or sexual transgression;

"17) I will never take any liquor or drink that causes intoxication;

"18) I will try to mould my life in accordance with the Buddhist preachings based on Enlightenment, precept and compassion;

"20) I firmly believe that the *Bauddha Dhamma* is the best religion;

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[1] This sub-section and stray paragraphs in this chapter re-use material used in my book *Indigenous Indians: Agastya to Ambedkar*, now out of print.

[2] *Paramitas*: ideals of spiritual perfection.

"21) I believe that today I am taking a new birth;

"22) I solemnly take the oath that from today onwards I will act according to the *Bauddha Dhamma*."

It is debatable whether the "firm belief that the *Bauddha Dhamma* is the best religion" was ever part of the formal resolutions taken by the Buddha's disciples, but let us not pick on this; we may accept that these promises by Ambedkar's followers are just an emphatic expression of their entry into Buddhism. It is a different story with those promises which articulate Ambedkar's own social and anti-Hindu agenda:

"1) I will not regard Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesh as gods nor will I worship them;

"2) I will not regard Rama and Krishna as gods nor will I worship them;

"3) I will not accept Hindu deities like Gauri, Ganapati etc., nor will I worship them;

"4) I do not believe that God has taken birth or incarnation in any form;

"5) I do not believe that Lord Buddha was the incarnation of Vishnu, I believe this propaganda is mischievous and false;

"6) I will never perform any *Shraddha* nor will I offer any *Pinda* [i.e. Brahminical funeral and post-funeral rites];

"8) I will not have any *Samskara* [ritual] performed by Brahmins;

"9) I believe in the principle that all are equal;

"10) I will try to establish equality;

"19) I embrace today the *Bauddha Dhamma*, discarding the Hindu religion which is detrimental to the emancipation of human beings and which believes in inequality and regards human beings other than Brahmins as low-born."

This list of promises is unique in the history of Buddhism, in that it not only professes to follow the Buddhist way, but also attacks a non-Buddhist tradition and rejects the devotion to a number of Gods whose worship was propagated outside India by Buddhism itself. The Japanese-Buddhist Goddess

Benzai-ten is none other than Saraswati, the Chinese-Buddhist God *Shui-tian* is Vedic Varuna, etc., all imported by Buddhism without the help of a single (non-Buddhist) Brahmin.[3] As D.D. Kosambi notes: "Pali records started by making Indra and Brahma respectful hearers of the original Buddhist discourses. The Mahayana admitted a whole new pantheon of gods including Ganesha, Shiva and Vishnu, all subordinated to the Buddha."[4]

Dr. Ambedkar repeated on the occasion of his conversion what he had been saying for years: that only conversion could really change the social status of the lowest castes. However, unlike many of his followers, Ambedkar did not convert to Buddhism merely because he found it socially useful. He had studied Buddhism and did believe that it was the most rational and humane religious tradition, the best for all human beings, untouchables and touchables alike. He consequently rejected the "opportunistic" conversions to Islam and Christianity, not merely because he considered these religions a threat to India (on that point, the Hindutva spokesmen are entirely on his side), but because he considered these religions inferior to the humanism and rationalism of Buddhism.

An additional reason for his choice of Buddhism was his highly unlikely belief that Buddhism, an elite religion thriving on patronage, had been the original religion of the Dalits.[5] In Ambedkar's view, the Dalits should not seek a new religion but return to their original religion. This motive is analogous to the approach of the Arya Samaj's Shuddhi movement for re-conversion of Indian Muslims and Christians to their ancestral religion: instead of "conversion", it is advertised as a "homecoming" or *ghar-wâpasî*, as the Vanavasi Kalyan Ashram calls its re-conversion ceremonies for christianized tribals.

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[3] A set of twelve Hindu Devas and a number of minor Hindu Gods are listed as Buddhist Gods (with their names in Mongol, Tibetan, Chinese, Japanese, Thai and Khmer) in Louis Frédéric: *Les dieux du bouddhisme*, p.258-268.

[4] D.D. Kosambi: *Culture and Civilisation of Ancient India*, p.179.

[5] Dr. Ambedkar argued this hypothesis of his (not too convincingly) in his book *The Untouchables: Who Were They and Why They Became Untouchables?*, reproduced in his *Writings and Speeches* vol.7, specifically p.315 ff.

Today, there are about 6 million neo-Buddhists, most of them from Ambedkar's own Mahar caste and related Scheduled Castes. Occasionally, local mass conversions to Buddhism still occur in these communities. Unlike the Dalai Lama, who emphasizes the closeness of Hinduism and Buddhism before his Indian hosts, the Ambedkarite tendency in Buddhism is overtly anti-Hindu and tries to maximize the separateness of Buddhism.

Nevertheless, Hindutva author M.V. Kamath quotes a testimony by social scientist Neera Burra, who "found many people who claimed they were Buddhists but had not taken the vows because they would not be allowed to eat meat and would have to give up all their gods and goddesses". Burra also observed about neo-Buddhist Mahars who did convert to Buddhism: "It is not an exaggeration to say that every single household I visited had Hindu gods and goddesses installed in positions of respect", side by side with the Buddha and Babasaheb Ambedkar.[6] The clean break with Hinduism has not yet been achieved.

11.2. Buddhist welcome to Ambedkar

In a brief critique of the Ambedkarite version of Buddhism, Sita Ram Goel draws attention to the fact that Dr. Ambedkar candidly admits that his own Buddhism has little to do with the Buddhist doctrine as laid down in the Pali Canon.[7] When we turn to the indicated passage in Ambedkar's book *The Buddha and his Dhamma*, we do come across statements which are rather surprising under the pen of a convert to Buddhism. He writes that the *Nikayas* (the core literary testimony about the Buddha) are unreliable, and that the story of Siddhartha Gautama leaving the world at 29 after seeing a dead, a sick and an old person for the first time, is "absurd". He rejects the "four Aryan Truths", because they "deny hope to man. The four Aryan Truths make the Gospel of the Buddha a gospel of pessimism. Do they form part of the original gospel or are they a later accretion by monks?"[8]

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[6] Neera Burra: "Buddhism, conversion and identity (a case study of village Mahars)", included in M.N. Srinivas: *Caste: Its Twentieth-Century Avatar*, quoted by M.V. Kamath: "Caste: its twentieth-century avatar", *Organiser*, 9-2-1997.

[7] S.R. Goel: *Samyak Sambuddha* (2nd ed.), p.iii-vi.

Questioning the historicity of the founding narrative of a religion is certainly a permissible and even a commendable exercise, but it is hard to reconcile with being a propagator of that same religion. Unless, of course, one chooses to redefine that religion completely, without reference to its founder's original intentions. While the Buddha (at least the only Buddha we know, the one attested in Buddhist Scripture) was quite unambiguous about the futility of worldly pursuits, Dr. Ambedkar would want Buddhism to focus on the pursuit of social reform:

"What was the object of the Buddha in creating the Bhikkhu? Was the object to create a perfect man? (...) If the Bhikkhu is only a perfect man he is of no use to the propagation of Buddhism because though a perfect man he is a selfish man. If, on the other hand, he is a social servant he may prove to be the hope of Buddhism. This question must be decided not so much in the interest of doctrinal consistency but in the interest of the future of Buddhism."[9]

Ambedkar's attempt to turn Buddhism into a philosophy of worldly social action necessarily implied a departure from the Buddha's programme of non-worldly liberation.

Hindu Revivalists like to point out that Ambedkar was seriously criticized by authentic Buddhists for mixing Buddhism with what Ambedkar's book describes as social reform, but what these Buddhists considered a message of hatred and separatism. Dhananjay Keer, biographer and outspoken admirer of Ambedkar but also sympathetic to the Hindutva movement, reports:

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[8] B.R. Ambedkar: *The Buddha and His Dhamma* (also republished as vol.11 of Ambedkar: *Writings and Speeches*), p.xlii.

[9] B.R. Ambedkar: *The Buddha and His Dhamma*, p.xlii.

"The *Mahabodhi*, a famous Buddhist journal in India, opined that *The Buddha and his Dhamma* is a dangerous book. Ambedkar's interpretation of the theory of *karma*, the theory of *ahimsa* and his theory that Buddhism was merely a social system, constituted not the correct interpretation of Buddhism but a new orientation. Indeed the whole of the book, observed the reviewer, explained the hatred and aggressiveness the neo-Buddhists nourished and displayed. 'Ambedkar's Buddhism', added the reviewer, 'is based on hatred, the Buddha's on compassion' (...) The title, pleaded the reviewer, should be changed from *The Buddha and his Dhamma* to that of *Ambedkar and his Dhamma*; for Ambedkar preached non-Dhamma as Dhamma for motives of political and social reform."[10]

Another paper, *The Light of Dhamma* (Rangoon), observed that "although this was a book by a great man, unfortunately it was not a great book". Dhananjay Keer explains: "The reviewer pointed out that the great Doctor tampered with the texts and whenever he found views in Buddhism inconvenient to his own, denounced them as later accretions made by monks. The author was nevertheless a great and good man; the tragedy was that it was neither a great book nor a good book, concluded the reviewer."[11]

Buddhist monk Jivaka wrote: "In India the movement started by Ambedkar was not Buddhism but a campaign for social reform under the name Buddhism, and he has promulgated the idea that bhikkhus are for the purpose of social service. But his book 'The Buddha and His Dharma' is misnamed for he preaches non-Dharma as Dharma, even sweeping away the four Aryan Truths as a later addition by scholar-monks, maintaining that the Buddha distinguished between killing for a good reason and purely want only, and saying that He did not ban the former; and to cap it all he writes that the Dharma is a social system and that a man quite alone would not need it (...) Hence the so-called New Buddhists or better named, Ambedkarists, surround bhikkhus aggressively and tell them what they should do and abuse them if they are not actively engaged in social work or preaching reform. The result is seen in the acts of violence they have committed, the rioting that has taken place in Nagpur and Jabbulpur and other places. For Ambedkar entered on his new religion with hate in his heart and his followers are still nourishing and fanning the flames of hate in the uneducated masses they lead."[12]

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[10] D. Keer: *Ambedkar*, p.521, with reference to *Mahabodhi*, December 1959.

[11] D. Keer: *Ambedkar*, with reference to *The Light of Dhamma*, January 1959.

In a report to his Government in 1992, the Sri Lankan High Commissioner to India, Mr. Neville Kanakaratne, noted the "regrettable fact" that a great majority of Indian Buddhists were members of the Scheduled Castes who converted under Dr. Ambedkar's leadership in order to assert their political rights "rather than through honest self-persuasion and conviction". By contrast, the effort by the Mahabodhi Society to spread Buddhism through proper information and teaching had achieved "very little", according to the Sri Lankan High Commissioner.[13]

If we accept the High Commissioner's assessment of such purely political conversion, implying that there is little genuine enthusiasm for the Buddha's spiritual message in these Ambedkarite conversions, we must notice at the same time that in the margin of the politically Buddhist community, centres of genuine spiritual Buddhism are evolving, to the dismay of purely politicial converts. Thus, the Leftist commentator Gopal Guru *complains* that Ambedkarite Buddhists are starting to take an active interest in Theravada Buddhist meditation: "Some of the Buddhist organizations are busy spiritualising Ambedkar's Buddhism with a view to supplanting the need to look at Ambedkar's Buddhist conversion movement as an emancipatory, critical concern."[14]

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[12] Jivaka: "Bhikkhus Who Lead Lay Lives", *The Buddhist* 1959/60, p.157, quoted in Heinz Bechert: *Buddhismus, Staat und Gesellschaft*, vol.1, p.57-58.

[13] *Times of India*, 30-6-1992.

For one, the London-based Trailokya Buddha Mahasangha "tries to disseminate the spiritual content of Buddhism" during "workshops of 3 to 7 days' duration", a classical format to introduce interested laymen to the basic practices of Buddhism.[15] This Trailokya Buddha Mahasangha was founded by Dennis Lingwood (b. 1926), a British-born monk who took the name Sangharakshita at his initiation in 1949 (by the same monk who was to initiate Dr. Ambedkar in 1956). Far from Ambedkar's depreciation of Buddhism's spiritual core in favour of social reform, Sangharakshita aims at creating "a new society where each individual's spiritual development forms the centre of all activity".[16]

A Scheduled Caste convert explains: "The Dalit movement lacks the positive approach of Buddhism. I no longer call myself a Dalit. I consider myself a Buddhist."[17] By contrast, another one complains: "Sangharakshita came to turn us into good Buddhists. But the problem is not becoming a good Buddhist, but a combative Buddhist. (...) How can one obtain mental peace if there is no peace in society?"[18] To which the Buddha, who lived in an equally turbulent age, might have said that if you want to wait for peace in the outside world before starting to make peace inside, you will wait forever.

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[14] Gopal Guru: "Hinduisation of Ambedkar in Maharashtra", *Economic and Political Weekly*, 16 Feb. 1991, p.339-341.

[15] Gopal Guru: "Hinduisation of Ambedkar", *EPW*, 16 Feb. 1991, p.339-341.

[16] Johannes Beltz: "Spiritualiser le Dhamma? L'implantation contestee du Trailokya Bauddha Mahasangha en Inde", *Asiatische Studien* (Zurich), 1997/4, p.1059.

[17] Interview by Johannes Beltz: "Spiritualiser le Dhamma?", *Asiatische Studien*, 1997/4, p.1065.

A less controversial but essentially similar Buddhist presence is the Vipassana association of the Burmese master Sayagyi U Ba Khin as represented by S.N. Goenka. As I have been able to see for myself, this tradition of Buddhist meditation has struck firm roots in Ambedkar's own Maharashtra, mainly through its Vipassana International Academy in Dhammagiri near Jalgaon where 10-day courses for laymen are offered. This way, a process of rapprochement between traditional Buddhists and Ambedkarite neo-Buddhists is already visible, so that we are probably witnessing the genesis of a genuine new Indian Buddhism.

11.3. Ambedkar on the Hindu roots of Buddhism

Dr. Ambedkar intended his conversion to Buddhism to be seen, both by his followers and by outsiders, as a break-away from Hinduism. Two generations later, the Ambedkarite neo-Buddhists are finding that those who have taken up the study and practice of Buddhism in right earnest, are very close to those Hindus who are serious about their Yogic and Vedantic paths. They should have known that this was inevitable: even Dr. Ambedkar, while generously ascribing unique achievements to the Buddha, did acknowledge the indebtedness of the Buddha to earlier Hindu thinkers.

Thus, Ambedkar traces Buddha's rational approach, which he values so much, to Kapila, the founder of the Samkhya-Darshana, the "viewpoint" focusing on cosmology: "Among the ancient philosophers of India the most pre-eminent was Kapila (...) The tenets of his philosophy were of a startling nature. Truth must be supported by proof. This is the first tenet of the Samkhya system. There is no truth without proof. For purposes of proving the truth Kapila allowed only two means of proof—1) perception, and 2) inference".[19]

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[18] Interview by Johannes Beltz: "Spiritualiser le Dhamma?", *Asiatische Studien*, 1997/4, p.1068.

According to Dr. Ambedkar, Kapila is the source of one of Buddhism's most fundamental concepts, causality, and also of the related Buddhist rejection of the belief in a personal Creator of the universe: "His next tenet related to causality—creation and its cause. Kapila denied the theory that there was a being who created the universe."[20]

Kapila's arguments are listed, and the last one introduces yet another fundamental concept of Buddhism: suffering (*dukkha*). It is brought in from an unusual angle:

"Kapila argued that the process of development of the unevolved is through the activities of three constituents of which it is made up, Sattva, Rajas and Tamas. These are called three Gunas. [Sattva is] light in nature, which reveals, which causes pleasure to men; [Rajas is] what impels and moves, what produces activity; [Tamas is] what is heavy and puts under restraint, what produces the state of indifference or inactivity (...) When the three Gunas are in perfect balance, none overpowering the other, the universe appears static (*achetan*) and ceases to evolve. When the three Gunas are not in balance, one overpowers the other, the universe becomes dynamic (*sachetan*) and evolution begins. Asked why the Gunas become unbalanced, the answer which Kapila gave was that this disturbance in the balance of the three Gunas was due to the presence of Dukkha (suffering)."[21]

Buddhism is quite close to the Samkhya-Yoga viewpoint: to Samkhya for its philosophical framework, to Yoga for its methods of meditation. Yet, sectarian Buddhists claim that the Buddha had first studied with two yogis, Arada Kalam and Uddaka Ramaputta, and had left them in utter dissatisfaction to go and invent a totally new system. This is typically the talk of "followers", of people who have never done any independent seeking themselves: in real life, discarding everything you have learned and building something totally new from scratch just does not exist. In the Pali Canon the Budda leaves the two teachers after they stated that they could not take him further on the path of meditation they had already done; they admitted that they knew no more than they had taught him.

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[19] Dr. Ambedkar: *The Buddha and his Dhamma*, book 1, part 5, para 2, in *Writings and Speeches*, vol.11, p.83-87.

[20] Ambedkar: *The Buddha and his Dhamma*, 1:5:2.

[21] Ambedkar: *The Buddha and his Dhamma*, 1:5:2.

In Dr. Ambedkar's narrative of the Buddha's career, we also, read that one of the practices taught by Arada Kalam in his Dhyana Marga (path of meditation) was the observation of the breathing-process, *anapanasati*)[22]; till today, this is one of the first practices which a student of Buddhist meditation gets to do. Alright, the Buddha thought that their teaching did not go far enough, and so he went out and took it further. But all the same, he built on what he had learned from others, as we all do, and therefore a lot in Buddhism is older than Buddhism. The Buddha rejected some of the things he had learned, such as unnatural breathing exercises and extreme asceticism. But then, he adopted so many things that were already quite common, such as his elementary ethical prescriptions (*pañchaśîla*: truthfulness, non-violence, non-stealing, chastity, non-intoxication).

This, according to Dr. Ambedkar, is what the Buddha was doing under the Bodhi tree after four weeks of meditation: "Gautama when he sat in meditation for getting new light was greatly in the grip of the Samkhya philosophy. That suffering and unhappiness in the world he thought was an incontrovertible fact. Gautama was, however, interested in knowing how to do away with suffering. This problem the Samkhya philosophy did not deal with."[23]

This is indeed the way human progress is normally made: your master has taken you this far, and from here you take another step according to your own insight. It is a different matter whether the method of liberation from suffering which the Buddha developed and taught, was all that new. At any rate, Ambedkar was sufficiently willing to acknowledge the Vedic roots of Buddhist philosophy, and thereby gives a handle to those Hindu revivalists who insist that Buddhism is but a branch on the tree of Hinduism.

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[22] Ambedkar: *The Buddha and His Dhamma* 1:3:3.

[23] Ambedkar: *The Buddha and His Dhamma* 1:4:3.

On the other hand, Ambedkar could also be extremely critical of Hindu philosophy. First of all, he thought that it had nothing to offer, on the contrary. He approvingly quotes Thomas Huxley describing Upanishadic asceticism as "reducing the human mind to that condition of impassive quasi-somnambulism, which, but for its acknowledged holiness, might run the risk of being confounded with idiocy."[24] Unfortunately, whoever equates the concentrated mental alertness developed in meditation with "somnambulism" and "idiocy", can hardly extol Buddhist meditation which develops a very similar state of mind. But the point is precisely that Ambedkar did not see Buddhism as a system of meditation.

Ambedkar's most direct attack on Hindu sensibilities was his merciless pamphlet *Riddles in Hinduism*.[25] Its central thesis is the absolute reduction of Hindu culture to a mere cover for caste and untouchability. That part was largely ignored by the public, because it was the type of thing which so many westernized writers and Christian missionaries had been saying for some time. The part which really caused offence was the chapter *Riddles of Rama and Krishna*, which contains a lot of ordinary scandal-mongering. We learn that Rama's associates, the Vanaras, are conceived in general debauchery by the gods with all kinds of nymphs and goddesses and mortal women, and that Rama himself seems to have been conceived illegitimately by the sage Shrung on

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[24] Ambedkar: *Philosophy of Hinduism*, in *Writings and Speeches*, vol.3, p.85, with reference to Huxley: *Evolution and Ethics*, p.63-64, McMillan & Co., London 1903.

[25] Republished as Ambedkar: *Writings and Speeches*, vol.4.

Kaushalya, wife of Dasharatha. Similar things are explicitly said about the Pandavas in the Mahabharata, and about many worthies in the Vedic, Epic and Puranic lore. Krishna was the greatest lecher of his age, doing it with whole villages of girls and married women.

All this was taken from Scripture and hard to refute. However, the exercise can also be tried on the Buddha. Indeed, one V.N. Utpat wrote a booklet *Riddles of Buddha and Ambedkar* in reply. It points out that the the Buddha's conception was even more illegitimate than that of Rama and Krishna: his mother was visited at night by a white elephant. Heartless as the Buddha was, he left his wife and child behind without asking their opinion, to set out on his selfish quest for personal liberation. By giving up his throne, he also robbed his own son of the inheritance of the throne, and when later his son came to ask him for his rightful inheritance, the Buddha cynically offered him initiation into his miserable monk order.[26] And so on: people (including the human being Siddhartha Gautama the Shakyamuni) have to make choices in life, and in their decisions there will always be a dark side available for foul mouths to pick on.

11.4. Hindu reaction to Ambedkar's conversion

Dr. Ambedkar was an unforgiving critic of Hinduism and the most prominent among formal converts out of Hinduism in the modern age. One might, therefore, expect the Hindu movement to be equally critical of Dr. Ambedkar. However, this is not the case, quite the contrary. Except for the arch-traditionalist like Swami Karapatri,[27] the predominant approach is to co-opt Ambedkar. At Sangh Parivar functions, a picture of Ambedkar is mostly displayed along with pictures of Maharana Pratap, Shivaji, Guru Govind Singh, Hedgewar, Golwalkar and other more obvious Hindutva heroes. During BJP President L.K. Advani's flopped Rath Yatra (car procession) before the 1996 Lok Sabha elections, his car carried just two pictures: of freedom fighter Subhash Chandra Bose and of Dr. Ambedkar.

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[26] V.N. Utpat: *Riddles of Buddha and Ambedkar.*

[27] T.C. and R.K. Majupuria: *Sadhus and Saints*, p.305.

Before elaborating on this general policy, we will first consider the handful of exceptions to the rule. In reaction to the mass conversion, the traditionalist Swami Karapatri arranged a big meeting in Kanpur to oppose "Buddhism and materialism".[28] In Maharashtra, the heartland of both Ambedkarism and Hindutva, violent altercations between the two movements have taken place, mostly in the agitation for the renaming of Marathwada University as Dr. Ambedkar University in the late 1980s and early 90s. This renaming was opposed not by the Sangh Parivar but by the Shiv Sena; as this is an action movement with no intellectual dimension at all, it did not bother to back up this agitation with any reasoned argumentation in writing against Ambedkar.

On the contrary, even the Shiv Sena too has a general policy of co-opting Dr. Ambedkar. Thus, V.S. Naipaul testifies about an Shiv Sena centre in a Mumbai slum area: "There was one portrait. And interestingly, it was not of the leader of the Shiv Sena or of Shivaji, the Sena's warrior god, but of the long-dead Dr. Ambedkar (...) Popular—and near-ecstatic—movements like the Shiv Sena ritualize many different needs. The Sena here, honouring an angry and (for all his eminence) defeated man, seemed quite different from the Sena the newspapers wrote about."[29]

Ambedkarites of the Dalit Panther movement have allegedly made two failed attempts on the life of the late Jeevan Kulkarni, an amateur-historian belonging to the Hindu Mahasabha.[30] His crime was that he had developed a critique of Dr. Ambedkar's understanding of Buddhism, along the same lines as that quoted above from Buddhist sources.[31]

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[28] T.C. and R.K. Majupuria: *Sadhus and Saints*, p.305.

[29] V.S. Naipaul: *A Wounded Civilization*, p.65. The book was written during the Emergency, well before the all-out deification of Ambedkar in ca. 1990.

[30] That at least is what he told me (interview, HMS Delhi office, 1992). He died a natural death of cancer in 1995.

The mainstream approach is to neutralize Ambedkar's attack on Hinduism by "putting it into context" and emphasizing the nationalist motive of his conversion to Buddhism rather than a foreign religion. The embarrassing fact of his formal break with Hinduism is rendered harmless by means of the typically Hindu method of incorporation: Buddhism is defined as simply one of the sects of Hinduism. Even Veer Savarkar, in spite of his earlier invective against Buddhism, called Ambedkar's conversion "a sure jump into the Hindu fold", and said that "Buddhist Ambedkar is Hindu Ambedkar".[32] Fact is that Ambedkar's choice of Buddhism, after two decades of suspense starting with his announcement in 1935 that he would not die as a Hindu, came as a great relief to the Hindu movement.

One reason for his embracing Buddhism was that he wanted a rational and humanist religion, for which he thought Christianity and Islam did not qualify. This did not evoke much interest in Hindutva circles, but they showed all the more sympathy for the second reason: that Buddhism was an indigenous religion which would not bring with it extra-territorial loyalties. Ambedkar has explained: "I will choose only the least harmful way for the country. And that is the greatest benefit I am conferring on the country by embracing Buddhism; for Buddhism is a part and parcel of *Bhâratîya* culture. I have taken care that my conversion will not harm the tradition of the culture and history of this land."[33]

Another fact which genuinely endears Dr. Ambedkar to Hindutva activists, is his sincere patriotism. He had a lively concern for the well-being and safety of India, e.g., while Jawaharlal Nehru stopped the army from reconquering all of Kashmir from Pakistan and allowed the Chinese to overrun

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[31] J. Kulkarni: *Historical Truths & Untruths Exposed*, esp. Ch.1, "Ambedkar and His 'Dhamma'", and Ch.2, "False Notions of Atrocities Committed on Harijans".

[32] Quoted in Dh. Keer: *Ambedkar*, p.503.

[33] Quoted in Dh. Keer: *Ambedkar*, p.498.

Tibet in his mindless *Hindi-Chini-bhai-bhai* euphoria, Dr. Ambedkar warned against the danger of Islamic and Communist aggression and even suggested that India join the pro-Western SEATO (South-East-Asian Treaty Organization): "The Prime Minister has practically helped the Chinese to bring their border down to the Indian border. Looking at all these things, it would be an act of levity not to believe that India, if it is not exposed to aggression right now, is exposed to aggression and that aggression might well be committed by people who are always in the habit of committing aggression."[34] During the framing of Indian Constitution, he advocated and succeeded in providing for a strong centre as he said that a week centre had invited foreign invasions in the past.

In 1954, when Jawaharlal Nehru was wilfully being fooled by the Chinese who were silently occupying Aksai Chin, Dr. Ambedkar said in an election speech in Nagpur that "Nehru's foreign policy had made India a friendless country, that Nehru had bungled the Kashmir issue and had sheltered men who were dishonest, and that India was encircled by a kind of United States of Islam on one side and on the other side Russia and China in a combination for the conquest of Asia."[35] He was proven right on this score in 1962 and 1965.

Dr. Ambedkar's conversion provoked a few Hindu authors to publish reflections on Buddhism and its relation with Hinduism. Thus, Ram Swarup wrote his *Buddhism vis-à-vis Hinduism* (1958), which is on the same wavelength as Ananda Coomaraswamy's approach, already discussed. His focus is on the spiritual common ground of the two traditions (or the Hindu tradition and its Buddhist offshoot), though he acknowledges a difference in style and atmosphere.

"Buddhism is returning home to India after a long exile of a thousand years and, like the proverbial prodigal son, is being received with open arms. Religious tolerance of the average Hindu partly explains the warm reception. But a more important reason is the fact that Buddha and Buddhism form an intimate part of Hindu consciousness. Buddha was a Hindu. Buddhism is Hindu in its origin and development, in its art and architecture, iconography, language, beliefs, psychology, names, nomenclature, religious vows and spiritual discipline. (...) Hinduism is not all Buddhism, but Buddhism forms part of the ethos which is essentially Hindu."[36]

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[34] Quoted in Dhananjay Keer: *Ambedkar*, p.455.

[35] Dhananjay Keer: *Ambedkar*, p.453.

11.5. Arun Shourie on Ambedkar

On 26 February 1996, Ambedkarites roughed up Arun Shourie, literally tarring his face during a speech of his in Pune.[37] In his weekly syndicated column, published in the *Observer of Business and Politics* and in thirty provincial newspapers (and now available in book form)[38], he had scrutinized Ambedkar's record and questioned a number of now-common notions about him. He had refuted the popular description of Dr. Ambedkar as the "father of the Constitution" or "modern Manu" (in a reference to the ancient patriarch Manu, to whom the "lawbook" Manava-Dharma-Shastra is attributed) by showing that Dr. Ambedkar's contribution to the writing of the Constitution was in fact very limited, and that Ambedkar himself had never claimed otherwise.

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[36] Ram Swarup: *Buddhism vis-à-vis Hinduism*, p.1.

[37] The assault was acclaimed in *Dalit Voice*, 1-4-1996; Shourie's reply can be read in his book *Worshipping False Gods: Ambedkar, and the Facts which Have Been Erased*, p.625-639.

[38] Arun Shourie: *Worshipping False Gods*. Immediately after being released (May 1997), proposals were in the air to ban the book (even one by a BJP backbencher, voiced at least inside the BJP executive; at that time, the BJP wooed the SC constituency and formed a coalition with the Ambedkarite Bahujan Samaj Party in UP). However, a large section of the Leftist Government consisted of Other Backward Castes representatives (like Mulayam Singh Yadav, who ordered copies of Shourie's book in bulk) who were in conflict with the Ambedkarite parties and annoyed with the proliferation of Ambedkar statues, and they assured Shourie (their one-time enemy for his fiery opposition to reservations for OBCs) that no ban would materialize.

Shourie had also highlighted the fact that Dr. Ambedkar never won an election, not even when he stood for a seat reserved for Scheduled Caste members.[39] On top of his individual defeat, his Scheduled Castes Federation in 1945-46, and his Republican Party in 1952, were utterly routed at the polls. In the 1937 elections, Ambedkar's British sponsors were gravely disappointed to see the landslide victory of Congress in the reserved constituencies.[40] Ambedkar's electoral record certainly belies the routine description of him as "*the* leader of the Untouchables": during his lifetime, most "Harijans" looked to Mahatma Gandhi as their benefactor in spite of Ambedkar's scathing criticism of the Mahatma's paternalistic approach. In respect of religion, Scheduled Caste people often venerated their own Hindu Sants rather than awaiting Ambedkar's (or in the South, Periyar's)[41] directives on conversion.[42] Many of them are now with the BJP, which follows suit in the glorification of Ambedkar and has set up its intra-party Scheduled Castes Cell, but which channels their Ambedkarite enthusiasm away from Ambedkar's anti-Hindu position.

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[39] Arun Shourie: "'It is painful, it is shameful, it is hateful'", *Observer of Business and Politics*, 22-11-1996, a reply to comments on his earlier article: "Is Ambedkar the Manu of our times?" Remark that in the passage quoted above, V.S. Naipaul (*Wounded Civilization*, p.65) rightly called Ambedkar "an angry and (for all his eminence) defeated man".

[40] In the 1930s and 40s, like other acclaimed heroes of social reform such as M.N. Roy and "Periyar" Ramaswamy Naicker, Dr. Ambedkar was literally a paid agent of the British, even becoming the Member for Labour of the Viceroy's Council.

[41] In ca. 1930-1960, E.V. Ramaswamy Naicker, a.k.a. Periyar, was the undisputed leader of the anti-Brahmin and separatist movement in Tamil Nadu. His movement, the *Dravida Kazhagam* (Tamil Federation), was soon outgrown by its less radical offshoots, the *Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam* (Tamil Progressive Federation) and the *Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (C. Annadurai's* Tamil Progressive Federation), which have jointly dominated Tamil politics for the last three decades. Periyar was an atheist and passionate enemy of religion in general, but supported conversion to Islam rather than to atheism or Buddhism because it would frighten the Hindus more.

[42] BJP Scheduled Caste Morcha president Bangaru Laxman (*Organiser*, 6-8-1995) accused Congress leader Sitaram Kesri, who had bracketed the Dalits with the minorities as sufferers of Hindu oppression, of thereby showing "disrespect to [Dalit] saints like Ravidas, Satyakam Jabali, Sadhna Kasai, Banka Mahar, Dhanna Chamar and others who protected Hindutva against foreign onslaughts." (most of these were Ramanandi saints of the late middle ages)

What seems to have hurt the Ambedkarites most is Shourie's highlighting Dr. Ambedkar's consistent collaboration with the colonial authorities, his "opposing the National movement throughout his public career right up to and including 1946", the fact that "throughout those vital years—1942 to 1946—while the nationalist leaders languished in prison, Ambedkar was such a loyal and enthusiastic minister in the Viceroy's Council", and that "as late as April 1946 Ambedkar was telling the Viceroy, Lord Wavell, that 'if India became independent, it would be one of the greatest disasters that could happen'".[43] Eventhough Shourie's position is well-documented, he stands practically alone with his demystification of Ambedkar.

One thing in Ambedkar's career which Shourie has not criticized, is his conversion to Buddhism, except to say that Ambedkar had developed a rather personal version of Buddhism. Shourie himself is a practitioner of Buddhist *Vipassana* meditation, and as a crusader for political morality, he has no inclination to criticize a tradition which teaches a practical path to self-improvement, and which stresses the need to take responsibility for one's own life rather than blaming "society" or "the other community" for one's own sufferings.

11.6. Rajendra Singh on Ambedkar

In the past decade, the Sangh Parivar has gone all out to applaud Ambedkar, de-emphasizing the conversion episode except for its nationalist motivation. Its publishing-house Suruchi Prakashan published a laudatory biography in 1991: *Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, an Outstanding Patriot*, by C.S. Bhandari and S.R. Ramaswamy. BJP lawyer Rama Jois has dedicated his booklet about social justice, *Our Fraternity*, to "Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, Great Patriot and Social Reformer". Both publications are aimed at incorporating Ambedkar's egalitarianism into hoary Hindu tradition, to the extent that they discuss Ambedkar's relation with Hinduism at all. The BJP and RSS party-line is that if you go back far enough in the Vedic tradition, you reach a point where the medieval caste relations were not yet attested, so there need be no incompatibility of a Hinduism fresh from its rediscovered sources with an Ambedkarite concern for social equality.

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[43] A. Shourie: "'It is painful, it is shameful, it is hateful'", *Observer of Business and Politics*, 22-11-1996, now in A. Shourie: *Worshipping False Gods*, p.607 ff.

During his visit to Europe in 1995, the RSS Sarsanghchalak Prof. Rajendra Singh spoke at a celebration of Dr. Ambedkar's 104th birth anniversary hosted by the Friends of India Society International in London. He started by emphasizing that the RSS was quite serious about propagating the glory of Dr. Ambedkar: "Sangh celebrated the [centenary] of late Dr. Ambedkar four years ago. In that one year, many functions were arranged by our Parivar. We also published a small life & work sketch of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, outlining his key achievements. We could distribute twenty million copies of that small booklet throughout the country."[44]

Rajendra Singh also enlisted Ambedkar in the RSS programme of "character-building" by presenting Ambedkar's life story as an inspiring example: "Dr. Ambedkar never got disappointed with difficult tasks, but faced the situation with great courage. I am especially appealing to the younger generation of students to take a leaf out of Dr. Ambedkar's life. At difficult times, his life can be a great inspiration."[45] This boy-scout type of appeal to personal character marks the difference between the RSS and the parties claiming Dr. Ambedkar's legacy, such as the Indian Republican Party in Maharashtra and the Bahujan Samaj Party in North India, which believe in unsentimental power (and muscle) politics.

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[44] Rajendra Singh: "Dr. Ambedkar", 14 April 1995, *Sarsanghchalak Goes Abroad*, p.62.

[45] Rajendra Singh: *Abroad*, p.62.

After going through Ambedkar's life story, the Sarsanghchalak does the usual number of extolling Ambedkar's role in drafting the Constitution: "His contribution in drafting the Constitution is therefore unparalleled and bears the stamp of his erudition and hard work."[46] Having made this *captatio benevolentiae*, he feels ready to take on the delicate point of Dr. Ambedkar's break with Hinduism:

"In 1935, because of the highly discriminatory treatment meted out to the Dalits, he announced that though he was born a Hindu, he would never die as one. This caused a lot of commotion in the country, and it is rumoured that he was offered millions of Rupees by the Nizam if he brought the Dalits to the fold of Islam, and similarly by the Christian missionaries. He outright told these group leaders that these religions were alien to the Indian soil [and] these religions would take away his culture from him. (...) He gave a very important message to the Dalits before embracing Buddhism. He said that he was embracing Buddhism because it promised equality to all and was a path of this very soil with many common features and thereby not taking the Dalits against the culture of this country."[47]

The RSS supremo enlists Ambedkar as an argument of authority in favour of his own organization: "He came to the RSS camp in Pune and appreciated its patriotism, discipline and complete absence of untouchability. But he said he was in a hurry and Sangh work appears to be a little slow."[48] Read: Ambedkar certified that the RSS was on the right path, the only difference being the speed with which they intended to get untouchability abolished throughout Hindu society. The RSS could only influence its volunteers and their families, not the recalcitrant traditionalists, whom Ambedkar wanted to force to abandon the practice of untouchability immediately by political and legal means.

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[46] Rajendra Singh: *Abroad*, p.63.

[47] Rajendra Singh: *Abroad*, p.63-64. *Nizam*: the Muslim ruler of Hyderabad, a large princely state in Central India, who was extremely wealthy thanks to the diamond mines there.

[48] Rajendra Singh: *Abroad*, p.64.

Prof. Rajendra Singh concludes his eulogy: "We salute the Architect of our Constitution, his erudition and hard work, his great patriotism and practical outlook. But it was natural that he could not stomach the indignities heaped on the Dalits and the attitude of our upper castes in the Hindu society appeared to change too slowly. Let us take a vow on this occasion to make the Hindu society free from aberrations, a society full of harmony, self-confidence and knowledge, so that it can carry the message of the great Rishis to the whole world."[49] If incorporating a declared enemy into your own pantheon is a virtue, a compliment for being unusually virtuous cannot be denied to the Hindus in general or to the Sangh Parivar in particular.

11.7. Savarkar on Buddhism and Untouchability

For the remainder of this chapter, we will focus on more polemical contributions, taking on the claim with which Dr. Ambedkar justified his conversion, viz. that Buddhism is free of caste and untouchability and even originated as a revolt against these institutions. This view is quite popular among the scularists, e.g. Praful Bidwai claims that Buddhism "drew adherents from those very layers of Hindu society which lay at the oppressed and underprivileged bottom of the hierarchy".[50] In 1931 already, a Congress commission had claimed about "caste restrictions" that "the whole soul of the nation had rebelled against them in the shape of Buddhism".[51]

The first challenge to this view had already been thrown in Veer Savarkar's book *Hindutva*. At least on some points, for at first sight it seems to confirm the conventional view. Under the title "Institutions in favour of Nationality", Savarkar explains how the caste system gained in strength as a reaction against Buddhism, and how it strengthened social and national cohesion:

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[49] Rajendra Singh: *Abroad*, p.64.

[50] Praful Bidwai: "Hindutva's fallacies and fantasies", *Frontline*, 21-11-1998.

[51] *Report of the Congress Committee of Enquiry into the Cawnpore Riots* (1931), reproduced in N.G. Barrier: *Roots of Comunal Politics*, p.125.

"The system of four varnas which could not be wiped away even under the Buddhistic sway grew in popularity to such an extent that kings and emperors felt it a distinction to be called 'one who established the system of four varnas'. Reaction in favour of this institution grew so strong that our nationality was almost getting identified with it."[52] Savarkar thereby accepts and repeats a very commonly held notion about Buddhism, viz. that Buddhism tried to "wipe away the system of four varnas".

The statement is puzzling if one considers *Hindutva* as a mere pamphlet, for it is at odds with Savarkar's own anti-caste stand taken in the very same book (including a plea to physically unify the Hindu nation by inter-caste marriage). Either he didn't think of the contradiction or he was just being scholarly, subtly differentiating the positive role which he attributes to the caste system in the post-Maurya age, from the negative role which he thought caste was playing in modern India. The same explanation could be given to the fact that he did not turn pro-Buddhist after noticing a historical antagonism between Buddhism and the caste system. The question is, however, whether this antagonism is all that historical; we will take that up in the next section.

After describing Buddhism as antagonistic to caste, Savarkar surprisingly accuses Buddhism of having promoted and aggravated the institution of Untouchability. His reasoning is that Buddhism has invented ahimsa (*quod non*) and the notion of "right livelihood" (one item on the Buddhist "eightfold path", meaning the prohibition on making a living by sinful means), and has consequently indicted those who make a living through un-Buddhist occupations:

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[52] V.D. Savarkar: *Hindutva*, p.27.

"Even today not only common people and good many propagandists but even historians seem to be labouring under the delusion that the Buddhists did not recognize the principle of untouchability, and that no one was considered untouchable in the Buddhist regime. What is laid down in someone's religious texts is beside the point. What the actual practice was is the most pertinent thing. One unavoidable result of the violent way in which the Buddhists tried to establish the principle of 'Ahimsa', and of their declaring animal-hunting and flesh-eating punishable by death, of their over-enthusiastic and relentless efforts to search out such offenders and give the harshest capital and other severe punishments, was that the practice of untouchability instead of being wiped out became still more firmly rooted, widespread and most distressing."[53]

Reference is apparently to Ashoka, though his decrees against killing were somewhat less draconic than pictured here by Savarkar.[54] Nevertheless, it makes sense to reason that Ashoka's policy of discouraging the killing and maiming of animals added to the stigma on killing animals (as done by tribals who were still at the hunter-gatherer stage) and on working with dead animal substances (as done by leather-workers/Chamars or scavengers/Bhangis). Incidentally, even the Shaiva Hindu king Harsha of Kanauj "caused the use of animal food to cease throughout his dominions and prohibited the taking of life"[55], so the stigma on professions tainted by violence is certainly not an exclusive contribution of Buddhism.

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[53] V.D. Savarkar: *Six Glorious Epochs*, p.140.

[54] The exaggerated picture of intense repression against hunting should be read against the background of the preceding passage (*Six Glorious Epochs*, p.138-139) on "the martyr louse": the story goes that a 12th-century Jain king of Gujarat, Kumara Pala, forbade the exercise of all professions implying any form of killing and even had a man beheaded because he had knowingly cracked a louse.

[55] R.C. Majumdar, H.C. Raychoudhary, Kali Kumar Datta: *An Advanced History of India*, p.151.

The analogy with the despised *Burakumin* of Japan could be cited: they are the progeny of butchers who bear the hereditary stigma of their ancestors' disrespect for the Buddhist rule of non-violence and right livelihood. Indeed, to Indian ex-Untouchables, this should sound familiar:

"In the Middle Ages (...) Buddhism was responsible for the fact that one man was put lower than another. Buddhism prohibits the killing of sentient beings. People who killed oxen or horses and skinned them to work the leather, were looked down upon. (...) Their life was considered as only one seventh in worth of that of ordinary mortals. (...) They had to avoid places where others gathered, when they went to other villages they had to put out their sandals, when they met farmers they had to throw themselves in the dust."[56]

Savarkar tries to prove his point by quoting a Chinese Buddhist traveller as observing: "whichever caste or community—as for example the 'Chandalas'—did not give up the violent professions and did not observe Ahimsa according to the Buddha faith, were banished from the towns as untouchables; they had to form colonies of their own outside the towns and cities like those of the lepers."[57] The name of the traveller is not given, but if we assume that the reference is accurate, it is still not very strong evidence, for a foreigner may easily have misinterpreted this institution, particularly a Buddhist pilgrim who saw India as a Buddhist country and therefore tended to explain social phenomena in terms of Buddhist influence.

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[56] Akemi Koike & Allessandro Valota: "Het laatste taboe" (Dutch: "The last taboo"), *Wereldwijd*, May 1992.

[57] V.D. Savarkar: *Six Glorious Epochs*, p.140; reference is to Majumdar, Raychoudhary, Datta: *Advanced History of India*, p. 186; but in (a more recent edition of) this book, I have been unable to find this quotation.

According to Savarkar, Untouchability "in the Buddhist period especially instead of being weakened it was most scrupulously and mercilessly observed. (...) Those of the untouchables who are still under the delusion that the Buddhists gave no quarter to untouchability and so extol that sect, should do well to remember that the Chandals, the Mahars and other untouchables were far more miserable under the violently non-violent Buddhists than under the Vedic people who accepted the principle of Ahimsa with its limitations."[58]

This is interesting speculation, and the topic "the condition of the Untouchables under Buddhist regimes" ought to be taken up in right earnest to prove or disprove it. Until then, we should leave it as just Savarkar's opinion.

11.8. Jeevan Kulkarni on Buddhism and caste

Dr. Ambedkar's chief argument for Buddhism was that this was the only religion that did not in any way encourage or justify social injustice. He, along with the majority of modern writers on Buddhism, especially liked Gautama's supposed protest against the caste system. The question is whether the social-reformist qualities which Ambedkar ascribed to the Buddha were not in the eye of the beholder.

One Hindutva polemicist who accepted Dr. Ambedkar's challenge was the HMS amateur-historian (and veteran of India's desperate defence of its northeastern frontier against the Chinese invaders in 1962) Jeevan Kulkarni. He argues that the Buddha did pursue a political agenda, but not an egalitarian one, that "he tried only to establish supremacy of Kshatriyas over the Brahmins" while "the fate of the two other classes remained the same".[59] The pro-Kshatriya bias in early Buddhist literature has been noted by others as well, e.g. linguist Madhav Deshpande: "On the higher philosophical plane, Buddha totally rejected hereditary caste rank. But on the lower social plane, Buddha asserted a social hierarchy different from that of Brahmanical belief. He clearly asserts that Kshatriyas are superior to Brahmanas."[60]

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[58] V.D. Savarkar: *Six Glorious Epochs*, p.141.

[59] J. Kulkarni: *Historical Truths*, p.26.

Kulkarni argues further, along with many Western students of Buddhist history, that Gautama's objectives were not of this world, and that "Buddha was not a social reformer (...) The theory much trumpeted about the role of Buddha as a social reformer was discarded by a galaxy of scholars prior to Dr. Ambedkar's version (and also of infamous writings of Laxmi Narsu) of Buddhism. Most of them have decidedly proved that Buddha had never discarded caste system".[61]

Kulkarni calls Western authorities to the witness stand. Sir W.W. Hunter has written: "It would be a mistake to suppose that Buddhism and Jainism were directed from the outset consciously in opposition to the caste system. Caste, in fact, at the time of the rise of Buddhism was only beginning to develop; and in later days, when Buddhism commenced its missionary careers, it took caste with it into regions where upto that time the institution had not penetrated."[62]

Hermann Oldenberg is quoted as explaining how Buddha had other concerns than social reform: "Caste has no value for him, for everything earthly has ceased to affect his interests, but it never occurs to him to exercise his influence for the abolition or for the mitigation of the severity of its rules for those who have lagged behind in the worldly surroundings."[63] R. Spencer Hardy wrote: "The existence of the four great tribes is recognized continually in the *Jatakas*, and inferiority of caste is recognized as giving rise to the same usages and as being attended with degradation."[64] Prof. T.W. Rhys-Davids has given details about caste practices in over 100 Buddhist communities.[65]

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[60] Madhav Deshpande: "Language and legitimacy: Buddhist and Hindu techniques", in V. Subramaniam, ed.: *Buddhist-Hindu Interactions*, p.27. The focus of his paper is on the resultant language policy in early Buddhism, viz. the rejection of Brahminical Sanskrit in favour of the metropolitan Magadhi Prakrit (comparable to the downgrading of clerical Latin in the late Renaissance period in favour of national vernaculars promoted by absolute kings and the emerging bourgeoisie).

[61] J. Kulkarni: *Historical Truths*, p.26. Prof. P. Laxmi Narsu's *Essence of Buddhism* was Dr. Ambedkar's acknowledged guide on Buddhism; he helped in getting the book published through Thacker & Co., Mumbai 1948; vide D. Keer: *Dr. Ambedkar*, p.400.

[62] W.W. Hunter: *Imperial Gazetteer* 1907; quoted in J. Kulkarni: *Historical Truths*, p.27.

The list of Western supporters of Kulkarni's critique could easily be extended, e.g. Alex Wayman writes: "It is generally stated in Western writings on Buddhism that Buddhism is directly opposed to the caste system. While it is true that such distinctions in status perpetuated by social norms were not the basis for admission into monasterial monk training, and also true that Buddhist literature contains some sharp attacks on what are referred to as 'Brahmin pretensions', lay Buddhists had to respect social norms and even Buddhist literature generated by the monks differs in response to the caste system, usually remaining silent about it."[66]

This is confirmed by the Dutch Buddhologist Prof. Zürcher: "In modern popularizing writings, one often reads that 'egalitarian' Buddhism was essentially a 'protest movement' against the Brahminical caste system. It is true that the Buddhist view of caste is different from and more rational than the religious justification which one finds in Brahminism. But neither the Buddha himself, nor any pre-modern Buddhist teacher after him has combated the caste system. The explanation of the egalitarian attitude which we find in the *sangha*, is simple. Caste is a social distinction, which belongs in the world of the laity, where it is completely proper and self-evident. As soon as someone becomes a monk, he in principle steps completely out of the world. He renounces his family and family ritual, and therefore also the caste to which his family belongs. Like all other Indian ascetics inside and outside Buddhism, he is a complete 'outsider': for him, social distinctions—those of caste included—have not become objectionable, but meaningless."[67]

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[63] H. Oldenberg: *Buddha* (republished 1971), p.154, quoted by Kulkarni: *Historical Truths*, p.27.

[64] R. Spencer Hardy: *Manual of Buddhism* (1853), quoted by Kulkarni: *Historical Truths*, p.26.

[65] T.W. Rhys-Davids in *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 1891-92, quoted by J. Kulkarni: *Historical Truths*, p.26.

[66] A. Wayman: "The Buddhist attitude toward Hinduism", *Studia Missionalia* 1993, p.330.

Kulkarni's argument against claims of Buddhist egalitarianism even finds support among Indian Marxists, at least among those of an earlier generation who had not yet taken to using Buddhism as a stick with which to beat Hinduism. The rhetoric about "egalitarian Buddhism vs. oppressive Hinduism" is now so influential in India's collective consciousness that I consider it worthwhile to hear their testimonies too. The eminent historian D.D. Kosambi pointed out that in the recruitment of monks, the candidate's social position was not entirely disregarded: "...runaway slaves, savage tribesmen, escaped criminals, the chronically ill and the indebted as well as aboriginal Nagas were denied admission into the order."[68]

To ensure peace for itself and avoid trouble with society (creditors, aggrieved slave-owners etc.), it was a logical decision for the Buddhist Sangha to keep out all those who could attract angry attention. The encounter with worldly suffering (typified by an old man, a sick man and a corpse) had convinced Gautama to turn away from the world and to focus on spiritual exercises. The monks did not want to be disturbed with social problems, and the atmosphere they created for themselves in their monasteries was meant to focus their attention on their spiritual practice, not on the social needs of the laymen:

"No rotting half-eaten corpse, no leprous beggar with festering sores mars the smooth harmony of sumptuous frescoes and reliefs to remind the monk of the Founder's doctrine. Nor does the art portray the normal hardships of the poorest villager, whose surplus the monk could eat, but whose misery was easily discounted on the callous theory that the suffering must have been deserved because of misdeeds in some previous birth."[69]

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[67] E. Zürcher: *Boeddhisme*, p.49.

[68] D.D. Kosambi: *The Culture and Civilisation of Ancient India*, p.179.

Not unlike clerics in other religions (including Brahmins), Buddhist monks tended to develop a certain smugness regarding the privileges which came with their spiritual prestige. This is but a general human failing and cannot be held against Buddhism as such, but it is nonetheless notable that if Buddhism wasn't any worse than others in this respect, it wasn't any better either.

Where slavery existed, Buddhism did not abolish it. The Buddha never ordered the masters to set the slaves free, nor the slaves to revolt against their masters. Buddhist monasteries continued the labour arrangements existing in society at large. In his study on slavery in ancient India, the Marxist historian Dev Raj Chanana noticed the stark contrast between the actual history of Buddhist social practice and the more "progressive" picture given by modern writers, who fail to register the existence of serfdom in connection with the Buddhist monasteries:

"On reading the modern works concerning the Buddhist order in India one gains the impression that no slave labour was employed in the monasteries. One would be inclined to believe that all the work, even in the big monasteries like [those] of Kosambi or Rajagriha, was carried out by the monks themselves. However, a study of Pali literature shows clearly that the situation was otherwise."[70]

From the beginning, Buddhism shared the disdain for manual labour expressed by certain Brahminical and ancient Greek sources, which held that philosophical pursuits required a freedom from labour tasks. According to Chanana, this attitude to labour had not always existed in India to the same extent: "This attitude to manual work as an imposition is in contrast with the view expressed in an earlier epoch, in the Rigveda, where there is no expression of any dislike of manual work. This is, in part at least, due to the absence of the division of labour as seen in the well-known verse describing various jobs, intellectual and manual, undertaken by members of one and the same family."[71] In the case of Buddhism, however, "we must not forget that the Buddha, anxious to free his monks of material preoccupations, had forbidden almost all manual labour to them."[72]

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[69] D.D. Kosambi: *Ancient India*, p.179.

[70] Dev Raj Chanana: *Slavery in Ancient India*, p.81.

To the slaves, Buddhism gave the same justification of their condition as is always scornfully attributed to Hinduism. Chanana summarizes: "On the other hand he advised the slaves to bear patiently with their lot and explained the same as follows. If a person is born a slave, it is the consequence of some bad acts of an earlier life and the best way for him is to submit willingly to his lot. He should submit to all sorts of treatment at the hands of his master and should never allow any feeling of revenge to grow within himself, even if the other should try to kill him. In such cases, a change of destiny is promised to the slave in the next birth. (...) In case, however, such a person is lucky enough to obtain manumission from his master, he may obtain ordination and thus try to secure salvation from the cycle of transmigration, i.e. release from the slavery of life and death."[73]

So, the same allegation of using the karma doctrine as an opium for the people to keep them happy in their submission has been levelled against the Buddha as well as against Puranic Hinduism: "That he derived his conclusion from the widely accepted belief in the theory of karma, of the retribution of acts, need not be stressed again and again. To him and his followers birth in a particular group was the consequence of certain good or evil acts. Since the retribution was believed to be inexorable, unvarying, like the working of a machine, he could not but advocate complete submission to one's destiny (...) we may agree that the Buddha (from what we learn about him in the Tipitaka) sincerely believed in [karma]. But even from this angle it is clear that disobedience on the part of a slave or servant was considered as an evil act. The same view was held of bad treatment on the part of a master."[74]

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[71] D.R. Chanana: *Slavery*, p.59, with reference to Rgveda 9:112:3.

[72] D.R. Chanana: *Slavery*, p.82; in footnote, he aptly remarks the contrast with Christian monasticism, where, in the words of St. Benedict, "work is prayer".

[73] D.R. Chanana: *Slavery*, p.61.

The Hindutva horizon being typically limited to India, Jeevan Kulkarni overlooks what could have been one of his strongest arguments: the fact that Buddhism's non-interest in social reform is amply demonstrated by its career outside India. Everywhere it integrated itself into the existing social and political set-up, from bureaucratic centralism in China to feudal militarism in Japan. There is no known case of any of these branches of Buddhism calling for social reform, let alone for a social revolution as far-reaching as the abolition of caste would have meant in India. After centuries of profound impact of Buddhism, Tibetan society was in such a state that the Chinese Communists could claim in 1950 (with exaggeration, but not without a kernel of truth) that 95% of the Tibetans were living in slavery. Buddhism does not seem to have made Tibet's traditional feudalism any more egalitarian than it had been in the pre-Buddhist past.

Outside India, a number of sources confirm that Buddhist monasteries employed slaves: "There are numerous references to prove the existence of slaves in the Buddhist monasteries in China. (...) These slaves were normally in charge of the maintenance of the monasteries but could also be sent to aid the peasants at the time of ploughing, harvesting, etc. Public slaves and criminals used to be formed into groups and known as the 'families of the Buddha'."[75] Perhaps "slave" is too strong a term here, as many slave-holding societies had intermediate forms of semi-free serfdom; but "egalitarianism" is certainly a different thing. Apart from slave-owning, the monasteries also upheld milder forms of social inequality. In China, they were feudal landlords, and under the Tang dynasty (618-907) the Sangha was even the biggest land-owner in the empire, until it was expropriated (in what has been mis-termed the "Buddhist persecution") because its tax-exempt status disrupted the economy. It also goes without saying that the traditional inequality between men and women was fully accepted: nuns were always lower in rank than monks.[76] We may therefore agree that by and large, Buddhism cannot be considered a pioneer of modern egalitarianism.

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[74] D.R. Chanana: *Slavery*, p.62.

Coming to the specific form of inequality which is the caste system, in a survey of the Buddhist canon, we do find a number of references to this subject. These instances show that Buddhism was not meant as a social revolution, even when it was critical of caste inequality. Thus, in a list of parables from the Pali Canon, we find the well-known simile: "Whether kindled by a priest, a warrior, a trader or a serf, from whatsoever type of fuel, a fire will emit light and heat; even so, all men, regardless of caste, are equally capable of the highest spiritual attainment."[77] This merely says that the spiritual dimension is common to all, not that the differentiation of men into castes or even the secular inequality between these castes should be abolished.

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[75] D.R. Chanana: *Slavery*, p.85-86, with reference to J. Gernet (and to Chinese sources quoted by him): *Aspects économiques du bouddhisme en Chine*, Paris 1956.

[76] The fact is noted with naïve indignation in Tibet by Erik Bruijn: *Tantra*, p.127 ff.

[77] Sangharakshita: *The Eternal Legacy*, p.35.

Another instance is the famous story from the Divyavadana (2nd century AD?), of the noble monk Ananda and the low-caste girl Prakriti. The girl tries to seduce the monk, but through the Buddha's miraculous intervention, her efforts are counterproductive, and it is she who follows the monk into the Sangha: she becomes a nun. But the public objects to the ordination of an outcaste, and so the Buddha explains that caste divisions have no bearing on spiritual life.[78] But he does not say that henceforth, his audience should intermarry with the lowest castes. He does just the opposite: he contrasts worldly and spiritual spheres, and justifies the neglect of caste discrimination in this case with reference to the girl's spiritual vocation, thereby acquiescing in the persistence of caste in lay society. On the other hand, even if only for theorical purposes, the text's demolition of caste inequality is thorough, e.g. it is said that in a previous life, the two had already been lovers, though then their castes had been the opposite.[79]

Another promising example is where the Buddha grills a Brahmin with Socrates-type questions to extract from him the insight that to be a Brahmin, or conversely to be unworthy of the practices of Arya Dharma, birth is not the criterion.[80] The modern editor explains that the Buddha "vindicates his own universalist outlook and severely criticizes the whole theoretical basis of the brahminical caste structure".[81] Here, then, we reach the limit of Savarkar's and Kulkarni's revision of the claim of Buddhist egalitarianism: eventhough

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[78] Sangharakshita: *The Eternal Legacy*, p.63.

[79] This scenario, incidentally, shows how the doctrine of reincarnation can undermine the caste system rather than support it, for it reduces caste status to something superficial, a coat which is taken off and exchanged for a new one with every new birth.

[80] *Dhammapada* 26, discussed in Sangharakshita: *Eternal Legacy*, p.10, and in Alex Wayman: "The Buddhist attitude towards Hinduism", *Studia Missionalia* 1993, p.336.

[81] Sangharakshita: *Eternal Legacy*, p.63.

Buddhism did not reform society in an anti-caste sense, some Buddhist texts did develop a theoretical criticism of caste. Yes, there was an anti-caste element in Buddhism, often voiced by Brahmin-born monks.[82]

Brahmin writers have not only codified and justified the existing caste system, and possibly hardened it; in the final editing of many influential classics of Puranic Hinduism, they have also unnecessarily extended caste distinction beyond the social sphere, incorporating spiritual liberation in the calculus of karma and caste duties. The crassest example of this tendency is the Shambuka story in what experts consider the youngest layer of Valmiki's Ramayana, where Rama "has to" kill the low-caste ascetic Shambuka because the latter's spiritual vocation is contrary to his caste duties and therefore harmful to society as a whole.[83]

In anti-Hindu polemic, this episode is always held up as proving the true and irreducible inhumanity of Hinduism. However, J.L. Brockington contrasts this episode of the Ramayana (7:67) with the contrary evaluation of a similar act in an older layer of the Ramayana, viz. Dasharatha's paying dearly for his killing Shravana, an ascetic of mixed Vaishya-Shudra descent (2:57): "There has been an enormous shift in attitudes between the period of the former, among the earlier additions, and the latter, among the latest parts included in the text", viz. an appalling hardening of caste discrimination.[84] The harsh caste discrimination of recent centuries is a vaguely datable *innovation* in Hindu social history, not an age-old condition.[85]

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[82] As pointed out by Alex Wayman: "The Buddhist attitude towards Hinduism", *Studia Missionalia* 1993, p.333-334.

[83] Bhagwan Singh, a Marxist yet nationalist historian who joined the Aryan Invasion debate with his book *The Vedic Harappans*, told me (interview, December 1996) that he thinks the Shambuka story, part of the *Uttarakânda* ("final part", also containing Rama's controversial repudiation of Sita) which is widely considered a later addition, is an interpolation by Buddhists precisely to blacken Brahminism. But then how did those Buddhists smuggle it in? If true, this would also confirm the anti-caste element in Buddhist polemic.

[84] J.L. Brockington: *Righteous Rama*, p.158. Reference is to Shravana.

A case could be made that this appropriation of spirituality by the Brahmin caste is what the Buddha criticizes in the Prakriti story and elsewhere. What he objects to is not the existing social system on the basis of caste, but precisely the improper extension of caste division to the spiritual sphere, beyond the worldly sphere where social distinctions belong. We may add that Sri Lankan Buddhists, who have a long history of fighting predominantly Hindu Tamils, and hence a strong sense of separateness from Hinduism, observe their own caste distinctions.[86]

Buddhism's lack of interest in social reform was implicitly admitted by Dr. Ambedkar himself, when as Law Minister he defended the inclusion of Buddhists in the category of citizens to whom the Hindu Code Bill would apply. He declared: "When the Buddha differed from the Vedic Brahmins, he did so only in matters of creed, but left the Hindu legal framework intact. He did not propound a separate law for his followers. The same was the case with Mahavir and the ten Sikh Gurus."[87] That should cinch the issue.

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[85] This contrast between less casteism in antiquity and more casteism in the Christian era is even proven by Buddhist anti-caste polemic itself. As Maurice Winternitz (*A History of Indian Literature*, vol.2, p.265-66) notes about the *Vajrasûchî*, a text attributed to the Brahmin-born monk Ashvaghosha: "This work refutes the Brahmanical caste system very cuttingly. The author (...) seeks to prove from the Brahmanical texts themselves, by quotations from the Veda, the *Mahâbhârata* and the law book of Manu, how frail the claims of the Brahman caste are."

[86] In his book *Vedda Villages of Anuradhapura*, James Brown mentions that the Veddas (aboriginal tribals) "fit in the caste structure of the Sinhalese Buddhist peasantry" (p.3), but that they are "excluded from Buddhist ceremony" (p.29) and, as the lowest rung in society, they "receive drop-outs" (p.34). On the other hand, while there is no intermarriage with Muslims (p.139), there is 15% of intermarriage with Sinhalese Buddhists (p.34).

[87] Quoted from *Times of India*, 7 Feb. 1951, in Dh. Keer: *Ambedkar*, p.427.

11.9. Conclusion

Neo-Buddhim is based on a mistake. Dr. Ambedkar opted for Buddhism on the somewhat contrived assumption that the Buddhist Sangha Councils provided a native model for modern parliamentary democracy, and mostly on the wrong assumption that Buddhim was an anti-caste reform movement. In Hindutva literature, in a few marginal corners, the latter assumption has been criticized, sometimes with reference to corroborative Western research. However, emanating from upper-caste Hindutva authors and written in a heated polemical style, this is unlikely to reach let alone convince the neo-Buddhost audience.

The neo-Buddhists are not Hindus, because they say so. Indeed, whereas all the other groups considered developed their identities naturally, in a pursuit of Liberation or simply in response to natural and cultural circumstances, only to discover later that this identity might be described as non-Hindu, the neo-Buddhists were first of all motivated by the desire to break with Hinduism. The most politicized among them, all while flaunting the label "Buddhist", actually refuse to practise Buddhism: because it distracts from the political struggle, and perhaps also because the Buddhist discipline is too obviously similar to the lifestyle of the hated Brahmins in its religious aspect. It doesn't come naturally to political militants to sit down and shut all activist concerns from their minds, whether to recite Vedic verses or to focus on the dependent origination of their mental motions.

Yet, in broad sections of the converted Dalit masses, the practice of Buddhism is catching on. From a Hindu or a generally spiritual viewpoint, this is one of the most hopeful and positive developments of the post-independence period: many thousands of people who had truly been a Depressed Class, confined to lowly occupations, suffering humiliation and low self-esteem, often steeped in superstition and given to alcoholism, entered the path of the Buddha. Rather than talk about the spiritual path and the glories of India's sages, as anglicized upper-caste Hindus do, they talk politics but do regularly sit down to apply the methods taught by the Awakened One.

Most thinking Hindus, from Veer Savarkar to Ram Swarup, have welcomed the conversion of Dr. Ambedkar and his followers to Buddhism. Rather than joining hands with the Christians or Muslims, Dr. Ambedkar stayed within the national mainstream by taking refuge in the Buḍdha, thus averting what to Hindus looked like a looming disaster. That he abjured the Hindu Gods and the label "Hindu" seemed to matter less, especially when research shows that many neo-Buddhists still participate in Hindu forms of worship.

That the neo-Buddhists will move closer to the Hindu mainstream, and possibly even take a leadership role in future waves of religious revival, is rendered more likely by the evolution in society. Thanks to education, reservations, and the ever-widening impact of modernization on all Indians regardless of caste, the actual living conditions and cultural horizons of Dalits and upper castes become ever more similar. It is logical, then, that caste animosities will gradually give way to the increasing realization of common Indian and common human concerns, in mundane as well as in spiritual matters.

So, from the Hindu viewpoint, the practical conclusion ought to be: let the neo-Buddhists be non-Hindus. Their chosen religion will shield them from maximum exposure to anti-Hindu influences, and will encourage in them doctrines and practices with which most Hindus are familiar. The religious development and deepening of neo-Buddhism and the process of social reform and psychological modernization in Hindu society ensures that the two will meet again in the not too distant future.

12. General conclusion

12.1. A concession to convention

As part of their entrenched power position, the British colonizers and later their Nehruvian successors have always tried to control the discourse on religion. Among other concerns, they have seen to it that the term "Hindu" got divorced from its historical meaning, which quite inclusively encompassed all Indian Pagans, in order to fragment Hindu society. In parallel with their effort to pit caste against caste, they have tried to pit sect against sect, offering nurture to the egos of sect leaders by telling them that in fact they were popes in their own right of full-fledged religions, equal in status but morally superior to Hinduism. Hindu Revivalists have countered this effort by reaffirming the basic Hindu character of tribal Animism, Jainism, Buddhism, Sikhism and more recent reformist sects. In some cases, the separation of sects from the Hindu commonwealth was entirely contrived and artificial, in others it had a partial doctrinal justification, though even there the proper distinction was never between them and "Hinduism" as historically conceived, but between them and the Vedic-Puranic "Great Tradition" of Hinduism.

The reader may have noticed that throughout this book, I have kept on using expressions like "Buddhists and Hindus" or "Sikhs and Hindus", expressions which some Hindu Revivalists reject in favour of "Buddhist and other Hindus" or "Sikh and non-Sikh Hindus". I have done this in deference to established usage, but also because there really is an anti-Hindu element in these semi-Hindu religions, whether *ab initio* (esp.

in the case of neo-Buddhism) or as a consequence of relatively recent innovations. It is of little practical use to call Buddhists Hindus when these same Buddhists are attacking Hinduism and defining Buddhism as the saviour in shining armour for the poor Indians gnashing their teeth under the mentally and socially oppressive weight of Hinduism. Or more briefly, it is not polite to address people by a name they reject.

It also goes against common sense to include in the Hindu category those who insist that they don't belong there and don't want to belong there. We tend to behave as if implicitly assuming the (unhistorical) definition: "Is Hindu, he who calls himself Hindu". In some cases, analysis may show that this insistence on being labeled non-Hindu is based on misconceptions, such as the identification of Hinduism with the caste system, with theism, or with belief in reincarnation. Nonetheless, the term "Hindu" is an item of language, i.e. a conventional system of signifiers, and can therefore not be used in total disregard of what meaning the language community gives to it. So, if people declare that they are not Hindus, for whichever reason right or wrong, it is at least impractical and possibly unjustified to impose that label on them.

Along with most Hindus, who are easy-going people not given to fussing over words, I don't think the gain of using theoretically defensible expressions like "Sikhs and other Hindus" outweighs the communal friction it may generate. Anti-Hindu separatism is at any rate not going to be cured by a mere choice of terminology. To be sure, it is possible that separatists get persuaded at some point to change their minds about the Hindu character of their own sect or tradition. But that will require better arguments or deeper experiences than mere verbal expressions like "Buddha the Hindu".

12.2. An uncompromising application of definitions

While something can be said in favour of going with the flow and acquiescing in the prevalent usage, the inclusive usage adopted by activist Hindus also has its merits, though in different degrees for the different communities considered, and also depending on which of the more inclusive definitions we adopt. First of all, if we assume the historical definition of Hinduism as "all Indian Paganism", we find that it *does* include (Indian) Buddhists, Jains, Sikhs, tribals, and modern Hindu reform movements including such starry-eyed all-inclusivisms as "Ramakrishnaism". In that respect, the Hindu Revivalist inclusive usage is 100% correct, and those who denounce it are 100% wrong.

In accepting the historical definition, Hindus would also avoid the trap unintentionally present in Savarkar's definition of the Hindu as "one to whom India is both Fatherland and Holyland". By the latter definition, communities who expressly identify with only a part of India, rejecting the rest, such as neo-Sikhs advertising their separatism in secular terms as "Panjabi nationalism", or tribals proclaiming themselves "Jharkhandi nationalists" or "Mizo patriots", would thereby fall outside the Hindu fold. Regardless of whether we share Savarkar's political views, and regardless even of whether we consider Sikhs or Mizo and Jharkhandi tribals as Hindus, everyone can see that this would be a bad definition because it *also* excludes people who are Hindus by any account and who also call themselves Hindus.

Thus, Nepal has a strong tradition of Nepali particularism, with orthodox Brahmins performing yajnas to prevent India from becoming too powerful and swallowing Nepal. It is perfectly possible to be a Hindu and yet not be a partisan of a state which unites all Hindus. One can espouse a Hindu cosmology, observe Hindu ethics, perform Hindu rituals, and yet not care for the land of India nor for its political unity. This is admittedly rare, and in practice Savarkar's definition does approximately cover all Hindus, but its inaccuracy in some contentious corners of the South-Asian land mass or of Hindu society is consequential. The idea of defining Hinduism in geographical terms is not without a basis in reality, and is even better understandable in the context of the struggle which

Savarkar's generation waged against British imperialism and Muslim separatism. But it is inevitably imperfect, and is becoming obsolete now that more and more Hindus live outside South Asia and strike roots (or, as converts, even originate) in distant continents.

Leaving aside the historical and the Savarkarite definition, even narrower or "credal" definitions (e.g. observance of endogamy, belief in reincarnation, acceptance of the Vedas) generally imply that the communities under discussion fall within the ambit of Hinduism, in some or in all respects. They do share common origins, or common social practices, or common doctrines, or common rituals, with a thus defined Hinduism. These common elements set them collectively apart, along with Hinduism, from the Abrahamic family of religions.

To be sure, under narrower definitions, the Indic traditions will fall inside or outside the domain of the definition to different extents. While Buddhism has been a distinctive tradition since the beginning, Sikhism's separateness is much younger and more superficial. In its prehistory, it shares a much longer common itinerary with the Hindu mainstream. If we take reverence for the Vedas as a criterion, Sikhism is unambiguously Hindus, Buddhism only in an indirect sense (viz. that crucial ideas of the Buddha are traceable to Vedic literature), while some tribals may never even have heard of the Vedas, even if their beliefs (e.g. polytheism or pantheism) happen to be similar to mainstream Hinduism.

So, we cannot give a simple answer to the question whether Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains, Animists and Ramakrishnaites *are* Hindus. In a way they are, in a way they are not; the question is as complex as the choice of a definition of "Hindu". If we agree to leave the safe ground of the historical definition, which classifies all the groups under discussion as Hindus regardless of what they themselves may say, we cannot escape facing cases where one or more of these communities do fall outside the definition, and are then entitled to be called non-Hindu. If belief in the Vedas is the criterion, Jains will be non-Hindus; or if the prohibition on cow-slaughter is, many tribals will be.

The objection to this is that the term "Hindu" was not conceived as a synonym of "Vedic",—if that meaning had been intended, the term "Vedic" itself was already available. Being derived from the name of the South-Asian land mass, the term "Hindu" simply happens to connote India and all religions native to India.

12.3. Egalitarianism

A more practical way of dealing with the question whether given sects are Hindu or not, is to study the specific claims made by the "separatist" ideologues of the communities concerned. When we do so, we find that Hindu Revivalist critique has pin-pricked (though not yet exhaustively) some of the cheap modern apologetics by which community leaders want to affirm the uniqueness and superiority of their own tradition as compared to Hinduism. This is especially true of the number one selling argument of all non-Hindu or would-be non-Hindu religions in India: that they, unlike Hinduism, are egalitarian.

Most importantly, there is not one pre-20th century sect or religion or community in India which is egalitarian or caste-free. The only seeming exception would be Virashaivism, a sect started by Basava, a Brahmin Prime Minister of a princely state in Karnataka (ca. AD 1200), hence hardly a "revolt" but rather a "royal experiment". Even at the height of his egalitarian innovation, Basava never called himself a "non-Hindu". He did promote intermarriage for one or two generations, i.e. a caste equality which was more than just spiritual. This may be sufficient to serve as a selling proposition in the modern religion market, at least among people who go by historical anecdote rather than living social practice. For, very soon, his sect simply became one more high and proud Hindu caste, which it has remained till today. Its egalitarianism lasted but a brief moment.

The actual history of Virashaivism illustrates how in the context of premodern Indian religion, the programme of equality has inevitably been confined to the spiritual sphere or else remained a mirage. The same is true for all the other traditions and sects now advertised as egalitarian, except that they mostly never even began to upset existing caste practice, not even for that brief moment.

To be sure, some traditions have preached and even practised equality at the spiritual level, rating spiritual practitioners purely on spiritual merit and proclaiming the accessibility of Liberation to all regardless of social or ethnic provenance; but have never endeavoured to actually destroy the caste system in lay society. But this purely theoretical equality was professed as much by fully Hindu sects in the Bhakti movement as by any would-be non-Hindu sect.

Egalitarianism as a socio-political ideal is a modern standard which pre-modern traditions can only claim as their own original endowment at the expense of their regard for truth. If inequality must be outgrown, then Hindus, semi-Hindus and non-Hindus will have to outgrow it together.

12.4. Honour by association

If a man is poor and without social position, or if he is the target of accusations and the object of contempt, he finds himself quite alone. If he was in a better condition before but has lost his luck, he sees his friends desert him, except for a hard core of *friends in need, friends indeed.* Even his relatives avoid and disown him. And if later on his name is cleared and his good fortune returns, the fairweather friends will again come flocking to his company.

It takes little more than this very elementary psychology to understand anti-Hindu separatism among the offshoots of Hinduism. Nobody wants to get associated with a religion which is hated and held in contempt. Conversely, when a religious tradition or doctrine gains prestige, numerous people and groups will surprise you with their discovery of how they had essentially been espousing it all along. We can safely predict that the day when Hinduism is held in high esteem again, the Ramakrishnaites will echo Swami Vivekananda's call to "say with pride: we are Hindus". On that day, Sikhs too will quote the Gurus' pledges of loyalty to Hindu Dharma.

At this point I believe it is appropriate even for an outside observer to become a little judgmental. After all, it takes a very contrived neutrality not to be struck by the obvious lack of honour of those who sail with the winds of dominant opinion like that.

When Ranjit Singh was establishing a Hindu empire in the Northwest, no Sikh thought of disowning his Hindu religion. When the anti-imperialist struggle was revaluating the national religion as a rallying-point and a source of national pride, no follower of Swami Vivekananda would have called himself anything except Hindu. But when the British disparaged Hinduism, anti-Hindu separatism gained ground among the collaborating communities. And when Nehruvian secularism embarked on its long-term project of making India un-Hindu, the spineless ones in Vivekananda's order betrayed their founder's injunction of pride in Hinduism. This is called abject surrender.

There may be situations where surrender is the lesser evil. Thus, we should not judge those Hindus too harshly who saved their skins by succumbing to brutal Islamic pressure to convert. But in the past two centuries, when the oppressors were mere liberal Britons and smug Nehruvians, remaining loyal to Hinduism didn't take that much bravery. The man who sees his friends abandon him when he is out of luck, though all they risk by keeping his company is a bit of a bad name by association, has the right to take a skeptical view of not just their friendship, but of their character as well. Even his enemy, who sees the so-called friends cross over to his own side, will not have a high opinion of them. If the Sikhs and Ramakrishnaites want to save their honour, they had better declare themselves Hindu before the anti-Hindu atmosphere fades away.

The point is valid even for those who have slightly more reason to profess their non-Hindu identity, such as Buddhists, Jains or the historically most isolated ones among the Animists. Even where they do have a case, it remains in most instances all too obvious that they profess a non-Hindu identity because this is profitable rather than because it is truthful. It simply doesn't feel good to be associated with the leper among world religions.

We can argue this matter out at great length, but the actual behaviour of the people concerned, their public assertion of a Hindu or non-Hindu identity, is rarely going to depend on arguments, be they doctrinal or historical. Instead, their choice will depend on considerations of prestige and, in really pitiable cases, on purely material calculations pertaining to state funding and sect-based job reservations. Trying to set this debate on a better conceptual footing has been an interesting academic exercise, but we should not expect too many tangible results from it. It is the power equation and the distribution of prestige which will decide the matter.

12.5. What Hindus can do

To a restless Westerner like myself, one of the traits in the Hindu character that seems less commendable is the lack of activism. In my experience, Hindus are always elated when they hear that a problem is going to be solved all by itself. In discussions of the Islam problem, I have heard so many Hindus predict that "the West will take care of it", or "the true tolerant Islam is going to defeat the fanatics", or some other scenario in which at any rate the Hindus themselves won't have to do anything.

Then again, perhaps they do act to influence matters in their favour, but in an indirect manner. Perhaps their fire ceremonies somehow set in motion an unseen mechanic of destiny (exactly as intended by the officiants) which subtly directs the course of events in their favour. Well, I don't know what it is, but somehow Hindu non-activism seems to bear fruit.

Two world wars passed India by, allowing India to profit economically and politically, and weakening her colonial oppressor to the extent that he washed his hands off her and quit. The secession of Pakistan could not be prevented (and again Hindus didn't try very hard), but the real Pakistan was much smaller and weaker than the one planned by its founder M.A. Jinnah. Moreover, the Partition turned out to be a blessing in disguise, dividing and demoralizing the Muslim community, giving Hindus a breather in remainder-India. The Chinese invaded and were in a position to occupy the whole Northeast, but somehow they decided to withdraw. Without Hindu intervention, the Bengalis rose up and partitioned Pakistan in 1971 (with just a little help from India in the final stage). Just recently, in the autumn of 2001, a Western intervention in Afghanistan greatly weakened Pakistan and clipped its potential for fomenting terrorism.

Given the clumsy performance of Indian governments and the Hindutva leadership, it is a miracle that there are any Hindus left at all. But somehow, without doing much, the Hindus or their Gods seem to get things done.

In this case too, Hindus don't have to do very much. Preaching to the minorities of how Hindu they really are, will work only with the already-convinced, and may even be counterproductive. Instead, at the practical level, Hindus may explore the common ground with these borderline-Hindu communities, these "prodigal daughters", simply by doing things together. No matter if neo-Buddhists disown Hinduism but sit down to practise the Buddha's spiritual discipline; let Hindus sit down beside them and also practise what the Buddha taught. No matter if Sikhs refuse to visit non-Sikh Vaishnava shrines, Hindus will continue to visit Sikh Vaishnava shrines, and likewise to offer worship at the Mahabodhi temple, etc. Let the others call these places non-Hindu all they want; Hindus may claim them as their own simply by paying respect to them. Daughters may try to break away from their mother, but a mother cannot disown her daughters.

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It takes little more than this very elementary psychology to understand anti-Hindu separatism among the offshoots of Hinduism. Nobody wants to get associated with a religion which is hated and held in contempt. Conversely, when a religious tradition or doctrine gains prestige, numerous people and groups will surprise you with their discovery of how they had essentially been espousing it all along. We can safely predict that the day when Hinduism is held in high esteem again, the Ramakrishnaites will echo Swami Vivekananda's call to "say with pride: we are Hindus". On that day, Sikhs too will quote the Gurus' pledges of loyalty to Hindu Dharma.

Given the clumsy performance of Indian governments and the Hindutva leadership, it is a miracle that there are any Hindus left at all. But somehow, without doing much, the Hindus or their Gods seem to get things done.

At the practical level, Hindus may explore the common ground with these borderline-Hindu communities, these "prodigal daughters", simply by doing things together. No matter if neo-Buddhists disown Hinduism but sit down to practise the Buddha's spiritual discipline; let Hindus sit down beside them and also practise what the Buddha taught. No matter if Sikhs refuse to visit non-Sikh Vaishnava shrines, Hindus will continue to visit Sikh Vaishnava shrines, and likewise to offer worship at the Mahabodhi temple, etc. Let the others call these places non-Hindu all they want; Hindus may claim them as their own simply by paying respect to them. Daughters may try to break away from their mother, but a mother cannot disown her daughters.

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